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THE GREAT ARTISTS

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"The whole world without Art would be one great wilderness."

GAINSBOROUGH

BY GEORGE M. BROCK-ARNOLD, M.A.,

HERTFORD COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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PREFACE.

TO a few lovers of English Landscape Art this little volume will, I hope, be acceptable, notwithstanding its obvious deficiencies.

The lives of these eminent painters of our rural scenery present many striking points of resemblance, and some sad points of contrast. Born amidst the same scenes, and educated under like influences, they were alike in their adoration of Nature, their allegiance to true Art, and their unwearying life of toil; but their professional careers were very different.

Gainsborough started on his career with the warm sympathy and approval of all whose opinion he valued; and although his merits as a landscape painter did not obtain *adequate* recognition in his lifetime, his career as a portrait-painter was a history of successes almost from the first.

Constable, at the outset, was dejected and enfeebled by the opposition of his relatives, and, during his career as a painter, had a few clear-sighted admirers, but many severe and misguided critics; and, save for the conviction which always sustained him, that posterity would do him justice by its verdict, he lived and died a disappointed man.

Both these painters were men of manly and independent character. Dissatisfied to some extent with the style of the great continental masters, thinking them not natural enough, that they displayed too much art and design, unable

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to acquiesce in their tenets, they both went to Nature to find where the improvement was required.

For the biographical information contained in the following pages I am almost entirely indebted to the works of Messrs. Fulcher and C. R. Leslie. These books, though admirable in many respects, are not very rich sources of information. In Gainsborough's case this is not surprising. In Ipswich, where he had lived for many years, Constable was unable, in 1797, "to learn anything of consequence respecting him," and, with the exception of Thicknesse's contemptible pamphlet, no biographical notice of the artist appeared until the year 1829. In that year Allan Cunningham devoted twenty-eight pages of his "Lives of the Painters" to Gainsborough. Fulcher's labours were interrupted by death, and had to be completed by his son.

Probably, apart from his professional labours, his life was somewhat uneventful, and from the year 1745 onwards might well be summed up in the familiar phrase, "he married and lived happily ever afterwards." The anecdotes recorded in his biography seem to me for the most part singularly uninteresting, and I have quoted two or three only.

Leslie's life of Constable is a charming work, but is for the most part made up of the artist's letters, as the title states. It gives one a delightful insight into the inner life of the artist; but the reader who seeks to collect many facts respecting the events of Constable's life will find that it was not the author's chief aim to supply them. I have also consulted with much pleasure and benefit Messrs. Redgraves' *Century of Painters;* Wornum's *Epochs of Painting;* Dr. Waagen's *Art Treasures in Great Britain;* and an admirable essay in the *Quarterly Review*, February, 1809.

G. M. B-A.

Brighton, *October*, 1880.

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GAINSBOROUGH.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF LANDSCAPE PAINTERS.

IT was in the last quarter of the last century that the British School of Painters assumed a position so pronounced that continental critics could no longer either ignore or deny its claims. Until then they had looked down on this country with sovereign disdain, considering it a land of mere unenlightened barbarians, wealthy in money but uncultivated in all matters relating to the Fine Arts; a splendid market indeed for the sale of their own artists' productions, but beyond a consideration as to the price which our collectors, and those who fancied they were connoisseurs, might be induced to pay for the paintings and sculpture created by their own heaven-born genius, unworthy of one serious thought. But at the epoch of which we are speaking a school of native artists sprung up in this country, and its distinctive characteristic was Landscape, the most modern branch of the Art of Painting.

The present high fame and reputation of this English School, which has during its comparatively brief existence already produced so many painters of more than average

merit, and several worthy to be ranked with the most gifted geniuses of Italy, Holland, and Flanders, is in no small degree owing to the number of artists who have excelled in depicting the scenery of Nature as she appears in all her pristine glory. The English landscape painters as a body have distanced all others in the excellence to which they have brought this branch of their art, and by their skill therein they have raised it to a more important position than it has ever before occupied in the whole history of art. What the Quattrocento and Cinquecento painters of Italy did for painting as a whole—what Titian did, up to a certain point, for landscape when he introduced it into his pictures—that have the English done for the art of representing nature, pure and simple, on their canvases. That such should be the case is not surprising; for the loveliness of our native country, with its exquisite verdure prevailing throughout the year, its sweet woodlands with their infinite variety of foliage, its budding hedge-rows, fairylike forest-glades, picturesque homesteads and hamlets, golden corn-fields and emerald meadows, and above all the indescribable atmospheric effects of our northern skies, the boundless wealth and glory of godlike light and shade, those wondrous cloud pictures, unknown to Italian painters — would alone supply subjects more than sufficient to fill the canvases of every painter who has ever lived or is yet to come, and convey to minds, even the most conventional and unimpressionable, a vivid perception of the surpassing, all-sufficient beauty of Nature. What is surprising, however, is that an English School of painters should not have long before sprung up, and by representing the scenes by which they were on all sides surrounded, have won such deathless fame as did the Cinquecento painters in other branches.

But the manifestation of the æsthetic genius of a nation is often controlled by remote causes, and operated upon by circumstances that escape the observation of any but the most inquiring and persevering historian. The tardy uprising of the English School of painting is a subject which opens out a field of

speculation too wide for our present consideration.[1] It is sufficient for our purpose that such a school did arise; and it is of the circumstances attendant upon the development of the art of landscape-painting especially, in the last century, that we now propose to take a retrospect.

During the transient sunshine which in the early reign of Charles I. had thrown its vivifying rays on art, some seeds of true taste had been sown, which from time to time during the succeeding century here and there cropped up, resulting at last in a harvest of native artists whose genius and merits, though for a time neglected and ignored in favour of the claims of foreigners and their English imitators, finally triumphed in the firm establishment of a healthy, flourishing, permanent, genuinely English School.

But for the seventy years following the Restoration, the tale of Art in England is a sorry one.

Kneller had succeeded Lely in 1680, and succeeded, too, in debasing art to the lowest possible pitch. This man, who in the course of his career painted portraits of ten Sovereigns, of every one known to fame between the years 1674 and 1723, and of many now buried in oblivion, did more to lower and vitiate the public taste than did ever Commonwealth, neglect, indifference, or any other adverse circumstance. The baneful influence of his style was felt so late as 1752, when Joshua Reynolds was told that if he wished to succeed as a portrait painter, he must imitate Kneller's style—"Shakespeare in poetry—Kneller in painting—damme," was the coxcomb Ellis's insolent remark to our great portrait painter.

It is to Kneller, however, that England is indebted for the establishment of the first regular academy for instruction in drawing in this country. This was in 1711; Kneller himself,

[1] Dr. Waagen in his 'Treasures of Art in Great Britain,' London, 1854, gives a curious summary of this consideration on p. 7, vol. i.

who certainly knew how to draw, was at its head. It was held at a house in Covent Garden, and amongst the pupils who studied there was VERTUE the engraver.

During all these seventy years the painter's art consisted of portrait-taking, sign-painting, coach-painting, house-painting, decorating, and the like. Truthful imitation of general characteristics was permissible, but exact copying of minute details was far more esteemed. Poetry had nothing to do with painting. Portraiture was the most profitable line a painter could engage in; mediocre and indifferent artists found plenty of employment in furnishing shopkeepers with signs. In the fashionable society journal of that day, 'The Tatler,' for 1710, we read that the use of pictures is "to raise in our minds either agreeable ideas of our absent friends, or high images of eminent personages."

Even twenty years later Hogarth, the emancipator of English art from the thraldom of Continental conventionalism, writing to Lord Bute against the formation of an Art Academy in England, says: "In Holland, selfishness is the ruling passion; in England, vanity is united with it. Portrait painting, therefore, ever has succeeded, and ever will succeed, better in this country than in any other."

It seems that the practical, shrewd Hogarth at that time doubted whether art, for its own sake, would ever be appreciated here. In this opinion subsequent events prove him to have been mistaken; and, in fact, the departure from his extremely successful and felicitous style of comic descriptive art for ill-advised attempts at historical composition show that he recognised at one time the possibility of a higher taste existing among his fellow-countrymen. To Hogarth is due the gratitude of every admirer of the highest form of landscape painting, for his relentless attacks on the formulas and conventionalism of an enervated and deteriorated foreign style, which in his day choked every attempt to depict nature truthfully. Endowed with genius, yet shrewd and practical, and

at the same time sensible, in a far higher degree than is commonly supposed, to poetical and emotional influences, his fearless attacks on the purblind worshippers of the "black masters," and the sledge-hammer force of his common sense arguments (which so shocked and scandalised the elegant and sensitive critics of the day), that the true art of a painter is to depict objects as they really appear, and that to this end he should make *living nature* rather than the canvases of dead masters his prototype, marked the birth of a higher and purer taste.

From 1723, a year marked by the death of Kneller and the birth of Joshua Reynolds and George Barret, we are enabled to follow with more satisfaction the history of English painting, and to mark many unmistakeable signs of the growth of a high appreciation and recognition of the incomparable and infinite beauties of nature, untrammelled by the formal restrictions of a false art, undisfigured by artificiality and gross allegory.

Here let us point out a few significant signs of the early century that had heralded the downthrow of the dark era of false art.

Early in the eighteenth century Bridgeman and Kent had done much to popularise a love of nature unadorned, by introducing a form of landscape-gardening, in which they utterly discarded the trim walks, the geometrical flower-beds, and the fantastically-sculptured shrubs, clipped into the stiff resemblance of almost all things in the air, or the earth, or in the sea, which the French gardener, Le Notre, had first introduced.[1] Several essays in the 'Spectator,' pointing out the superiority of Nature over formality in questions of beauty, also appeared about this time (1714). Pastoral poetry, also, began to take a truer form. In 1714 Gay published his 'Shepherd's Week,' which in literature recalled Englishmen to the beauty and simplicity of nature, and consigned to the limbo of indifference the unnaturalistic, so-called

[1] Among the works of Kent may be mentioned Kensington Gardens, Claremont, Esher, Lord Burlington's at Chiswick, and the grounds at Stowe.

pastoral poetry of Ambrose Phillips and Pope. In the same year Allan Ramsay, father of the portrait painter, published the first portion of 'The Gentle Shepherd,' and the encouragement this met with led him to continue the work in 1723. These events show that the characteristic English love of nature was not dead. The artistic and literary productions of any age will hardly create such a love, but they may do much to foster it; and we can always find that when contemporaneous popularity attends on such productions, a deeply-rooted true taste is somewhere existent in the hearts of the people. The love of nature was innate in the hearts of the English people. Their habits and mode of living had brought them into the closest constant communion with nature in all her phases—in the woods and forests, at the covert side, in the meadows, on the moors, by the brook; hunting, fishing, husbandry, tending flocks and cattle—all their pursuits, participated in more or less by the highest as well as the lowest, were invincible enemies to conventional and unnaturalistic art. Even under the chilling influence of so entirely unsympathetic a monarch as George II. some hopeful indications of better things might be discovered. But still it was a period of darkness, and if the nation did not entirely go with their monarch when with taste and accent alike bad he pronounced his unlucky dictum—"I hate Boetry and Bainting"—still there can be no doubt that the Royal mind to some extent presented a reflex of the sentiments of society, for painting, and more especially landscape-painting, found but little favour for some years after he ascended the throne. Nevertheless Horace Walpole dilates upon the interest which was taken in the fine arts, accounting this reign a shining era in comparison with the deplorable darkness of the preceding one.

The state of society was not favourable to the cultivation of the peaceful arts. The rage was gambling. It was the vice of nearly the whole of the eighteenth century. Basset, ombre, tic-tac, crimp, were the most absorbing occupation of all classes of society, the rattle of the dice-box was the music they loved,

and many a broad pasture-land changed hands over the green cloth. The poverty of poor Wilson, the miserable remuneration which Hogarth obtained for his pictures, and the depressed condition of English painters generally, attest the difficulty of obtaining fame and honour beneath the shadow of a Royal frown. "Face painters," as Hogarth termed them, found tolerable employment, but others, whose genius was undoubted, were glad to earn a precarious livelihood, as we have said, by decorating ceilings and staircases, and painting signboards for tradesmen's shops.

But matters began to improve. "Fashion," says Mr. Dutton Cook, "began to take up with taste. Dilettanteism became the vogue. Objects of virtù were now for the first time indispensable appendages of the houses of the aristocracy and the rich." Unfortunately for the English artist the taste was not for his works. Foreign artists and ancient masters were the rage. Cracked canvas and broken marble commanded high prices. The supply was fully equal to the demand. A race of old picture jobbers and antiquity dealers soon sprang into existence from whom a little real and much spurious ware was readily obtained. The 'London Magazine' for 1737, in an article attributed to Hogarth, inveighs bitterly against these speculators and their endeavours to depreciate any English work in order to enhance the value of their imported ship loads of Christs, Holy Families, and Madonnas, the sweepings of the Continental markets. In Foote's comedy, 'Taste,' which was played at Drury Lane in 1752, the absurd folly of the day was the subject of slashing satire. One of the scenes represents an auction-mart. A picture is brought forward and pronounced an excellent one until it is discovered to be by an Englishman *yet living*, when it is immediately condemned as "not worth house room." Fragments of statuary, trunks without limbs, a hand of the goddess Venus, a leg of Juno, with a swelling on one of the toes, (which the auctioneer explains is a corn), are lauded as masterpieces of the sculptor's art,—and other objects equally and even

more absurd are puffed up in like manner. The piece apparently hit the public too hard, for after a very brief run it was withdrawn. That it did not run far wide of the truth is evident from the fact, that at the sale of the effects of the sculptor Roubiliac (d. Jan. 1762), a picture by Joshua Reynolds with seven others were knocked down for the enormous sum of ten shillings. A contemporary author who has given us the most readable sketch of Hogarth and his time, speaking of a period a little later, draws a dismal picture of this period, but furnishes us with an additional explanation of the coming revival in Art taste. "Although it is difficult to imagine anything more confused, misunderstood, and hampered with rags and tatters of ignorance than was English art in 1727, Cimmerian darkness did not wholly reign. There were men alive who had heard their fathers tell of the glories of Charles I.'s gallery at Whitehall; there were some princely English nobles then as now, patrons and collectors. There were treasures of Art in England, and there were amateurs to appreciate them."

Perhaps the tide turned when Caroline of Anspach, George II.'s queen, a witty, handsome, and accomplished woman, extended the encouragement her lord was slow to give. The revival began, although timidly and with scarce any notice, and Hogarth's victory over folly and bad taste was won.

The fathers of the English Landscape School practised for the most part in oil. But there is another class of painters whose influence is, perhaps, more marked, and who contributed more largely, possibly, towards the unbounded success of this school than did the followers of the older style. We refer to the water-colour painters, whose practice, originating from a totally different source, at first grew up side by side with, and gradually merged in and became assimilated to, the more ancient method. In one respect the water-colourists had a great advantage over the oil painters in bringing the treatment of landscape to perfection. From the very first they found themselves face to face with Nature herself: they had to found their style upon

her, not upon that of bygone masters. In the works of the early topographic draftsmen, who were the precursors of the water-colour artists, truth of representation was looked for and demanded; not a general effect, calculated to remind the spectator of some particular master, whose name was a hall-mark whereby the most superficial tyro in connoisseurship might safely pretend to recognise genius and excellence in a picture. Thus, truth, the foundation of excellence in painting, was insisted upon. Beauty, from the very nature of the topographer's employment, would be sure to assert herself. It is true that the original employment of the topographers and early water-colour painters — an outcome of the fashion for antiquarian research and the topographical taste which sprang up early in the last century—was principally confined to making accurate representations of the objects they saw—to making surveyor's elevations of buildings, and panoramic illustrations, bird's-eye views of localities,—and did not aim at works of high art; it was no business of the draftsmen to introduce such improvements as cloud and light effects into their work, or to busy themselves with poetic conceptions; they were to induce in the spectator's mind a faithful conception of all the objects they depicted; but they had no occasion to strive to guide the spectator's mind to those objects most worthy of contemplation, or to express the thoughts and feelings with which the artist regarded those objects. But the everlasting truth, that, to all who are willing to study her, Nature is an open book, that her inexhaustible treasure-gallery of beauty is open to all mankind, was too assertive to permit of any barrier existing between the artists and Nature, or to allow them to be confined within any limits circumscribed by set rules or patrons' instructions.

It is unnecessary here to point out how the old art of water-colour painting with opaque pigments was altogether different treatment from that now practised; or that the present art is not even a development of the old one, or a continuation

of that of the old miniaturists—among whom Cooper and Hilliard, Englishmen, figure so prominently—although these artists did occasionally use transparent colours. Its origin is wholly with the topographic artists of the last century; who from making pen and ink sketches of the scenes they were employed to depict, gradually got to filling in the outlines with cold neutral tints; from that they proceeded to introduce the local colours.

"By degrees they began to feel the charm with which a scene may be impressed by passing clouds, sunshine, mists, and other atmospheric effects, no less than by the varying beauties of local colour as affected by the changes of season. The result of this appreciation of the lovely effects of nature was that the cold, spiritless, topographical drawings gradually gave way to the beauties and signal excellence of the Water-colour School of Painting in Great Britain." [1]

Of course the earliest water-colour drawings—stained drawings—topographical views—whatever you like to call them, were not equal in merit to the oil paintings of the same time—for the technicalities of oil painting had been carried to the utmost pitch of perfection long before, and where the manipulative processes in this branch of the art were faulty, it was because the artists had forgotten some of the traditions and secrets of their craft. Water-colour painting, on the contrary, was just starting into life, and it is astonishing that in little more than half a century from the time of the topographers' coloured ink sketches to the time when Turner produced his magnificent drawings, a new art should have been born and perfected. That it had its influence on oil-painting, is evident from the great bound with which the new-born British School leapt up. Most of the oil painters practised in water-colours occasionally, and *vice versâ*. Gainsborough painted sometimes in water-colours, and John Cozens, essentially a water-colourist,

[1] Preface to the Catalogue of the Royal Academy Exhibition of Water-colour Drawings. 1861.

painted sometimes in oil. The two branches, happily for English Art, in an incredibly short time became intertwined. The water-colourists painted in the face of Nature and became steeped in her influence. These were the men who could then appreciate Wilson, because they had learnt to appreciate nature ; appreciating, they would examine his work and compare it with their own, and exert themselves to get greater power out of their system. Then the oil painters, being in the majority of cases water-colourists also, saw innumerable beauties and effects that a close study of nature revealed to such inquirers as Girtin—to such adorers as Cozens. But words, we think, are needless to proclaim the close relationship that existed between the early water-colour and oil painting—does not Turner live in his works to this day? And whence did he spring? Such men burst forth into the world like a meteor of blinding brilliancy—so it appears to their successors. In reality Turner was the offspring of the two branches of art, at first distinct, and afterwards united in a bond of perfect sympathy.

This sketch would be incomplete without a mention of the Marine Painters. At the time when Hogarth was coming into fame, and beginning to know everybody, when his father-in-law had forgiven him for running away with the fair Anne, in consideration of his approved genius, his domestic ties did not prevent him from merrymaking now and then at Vauxhall Gardens and elsewhere with professional comrades, such as Frank Hayman ; and in 1732 we are introduced to Samuel Scott, marine and landscape painter, who made one of a party of five on a junket to the Isle of Sheppey. Marine paintings, the only branch of landscape art that had then received any appreciable patronage in England, was followed by a few artists with fair success. It might be supposed that this line of art would have been peculiarly attractive to Englishmen, and that, considering their traditional tastes and pursuits, and the stimulus afforded by the remembrance of the nation's naval glory, a large number of artists excelling in the branch would have been produced. But

such was not the case. The Dutch Van de Veldes, father and son, were never excelled or even equalled by our countrymen of that age in depicting marine subjects; and Monamy, Scott, Brooking, and Serres only imitated them, aided more or less by original observation.

Had our space permitted, it would have been convenient and interesting to have traced the steps which led to the establishment of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768. But we must be content with a bare mention of this most important event in the history of English Art; and also of that ingenious device by which Hogarth and nineteen brother painters brought it to the knowledge of the British public in general, and the world of fashion in particular, that this country had native artists possessed of merit of the highest order; we allude to the gratuitous decoration of the walls of the Foundling Hospital with the productions of this combination of English painters. The plan succeeded admirably.

Another valuable source of encouragement to art progress at this period was the Society of Arts, established in 1754, a society which during a period of twenty years expended nearly £8000, besides gold and silver medals and palettes, in premiums and rewards for painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, who had taken no part in the preliminaries, was induced to accept the Presidency of the newly-established Royal Academy, and amongst the original members were Wilson, Hayman, Gainsborough, and other distinguished painters of the day. In 1769 the first of a series of exhibitions, which have been continued annually down to the present time, was held. For a few years the Incorporated Society of Artists existed contemporaneously with them; the king, after the rupture which led to the foundation of the Royal Academy, had publicly assured this older body that they had his royal favour as well as any other body of artists, an assurance which he made more valuable by a donation of £100. But the Incorporated Society

faded in the brilliancy of the Royal Academy, and after 1791 was no more heard of.

The Free Society of Artists should also be mentioned. When the Incorporated Society was established, some of the younger artists, hankering after the premiums and rewards of the Society of Arts, elected to remain under the patronage of that body and to exhibit at their room in the Adelphi. In 1765-6 they held exhibitions on their own account in Maiden Lane. Then they changed to Mr. Christie's Auction Room in Pall Mall, which they assisted him to build. The Free Society came to an end in 1774.

Of the four splendid names in the annals of art, rendering the eighteenth century so remarkable — HOGARTH, REYNOLDS, WILSON, and GAINSBOROUGH — the two latter shine out brightly amongst the most famous of the world's landscape painters.

Of Wilson, our first English landscape painter, the Messrs. Redgrave say: "Certainly there is this praise due to our countryman; that our landscape art, which had hitherto been derived from the meaner school of Holland, following his great example, looked thenceforth to Italy for its inspiration; that he proved the power of native art to compete, on this ground also, with the art of the foreigner, and prepared the way for the coming men, who, embracing Nature as their mistress, were prepared to leave all and follow her."[1] Possibly there are some who consider that to Gainsborough is most properly due the title of the first English landscapist; for Wilson was not always free from a tinge of conventionalism in his treatment of landscape. Indeed it would surprise us, when we consider his training, the influence of his Italian study, the neglect with which those of his productions showing original simplicity were received, and the absolute lack of any encouragement accorded him by the British public, if he had courted starvation more than he did in order to educate the public to

[1] 'A Century of Painters.' Lond. 1866, p. 98, vol. i.

understand the true wealth of natural beauty. His career resembled that of many another combater of ignorance—poverty, neglect, heart-breaking indifference and apathy. Still as far as possible he was loyal to the principles of true art. Mr. Wornum says of his pictures with much truth and judgment: "They generally display the beauties of Salvator Rosa, Ruysdael, and Claude combined." [1] The same writer says: "The landscape painters of the last generation were more allied to those of the present school in style than the historical painters are to their successors of our time. The works of Wilson had more influence upon his contemporaries than those of Gainsborough; he is the pioneer of the English School of landscape painters."

Considering the painters of this period as a school, we are at once struck with the vastly differing style and treatment characterising its leading masters: "In other countries artists arranged themselves in the studios of great masters, and followed their precepts, transmitting them as traditions from age to age; hence there was more than a national similarity in their works. In the British School each artist followed the bent of his own genius; and if placed under a master in his early career he soon broke loose from such teaching, and sought a way of his own as soon as possible." [2]

Wilson studied under the great masters of Rome—studied examples by the greater masters of bygone days—was taken in hand by Zuccarelli and Vernet, most fashionable authorities—and left them all to seek a way of his own; he found one, floundered along it, lost heart, hope, position, everything but the way—he never lost that; and others following after him were guided by his tracks. Gainsborough, who received as little human instruction as almost any painter, threw over the Dutch masters who had been set up as an example for him to follow, and sought a way of his own—a way that he knew led to nature

[1] 'Epochs of Painting.' London. 1864.
[2] 'A Century of Painters,' p. 174, vol. i.

for it was to nature that he looked to guide him. He, too, attained a place with Wilson on the summit of excellence; like him he reached it by an independent path—by a way of his own seeking. Barret, disdaining human assistance and instruction, sought a way of his own, knowing that nature's light would illumine it for him. It is a matter for regret that this painter did not condescend to learn more of the technicalities of his art —that he did not, so to speak, learn to walk surely and strongly before he ventured abroad in search of the way; but a road he made for all that. Wright of Derby sought a way for himself, but it did not lead to such an eminence as some others. Cozens, Girtin, and Payne were not content to follow the beaten track which the topographers and Sandby had beaten out. The results of this independence and unrestraint of the founders of the British School of landscape must be looked for in the next generation—in the names and works of Turner, of Constable, of David Cox, and many others whom it would be invidious to particularise. We have a British School of landscape—not a school of Wilson, of Gainsborough, of Wright, or of Cozens.

Of the technical merits of the school of the eighteenth century we may be justly proud, considering the drawback of the impatience of our artists at instruction of every description, and the low state to which the mechanical or technical methods of painting had, all over Europe, at that time declined, *pari passu* with the style and ideal of art. Sir Charles Eastlake was of opinion, in 1828, that all the excellencies of painting are to be found in the Flemish schools, "to whose level we have never risen, for Reynolds, Gainsborough, Wilson, Hogarth, and a few others cannot match the hosts of Flanders and Holland." But this opinion seems scarcely sound. In the works of our own artists are to be found as great and as many excellencies of painting as in the works of the artists of any *one* country. Of course it would be easy to pick out points of excellence in the paintings of *several* foreign artists, and declare that such an aggregate of perfection is not exhibited by any *one* painter of

our school. But where can such an aggregate of perfection as is contained in the works of the four artists above mentioned be seen in any work of any foreign painter?

We will conclude this sketch with a quotation from M. Rouquet's interesting little work 'L'Etat des Arts en Angleterre,' a passage, the truth of which is as pertinent to-day as it was in 1755, and which is the keynote to which all observations on English landscape art must resolve.

"Si les peintres s'attachent toujours à l'étude de la nature comme il paroit raisonnable de le supposer, ceux qui font le paysage en Angleterre doivent exceller. Rien n'est si riant que les campagnes de ce pays là, plus d'un peintre y fait usage heureux des aspects charmants qui s'y présentent de toutes parts : les tableaux de paysage y sont fort à la mode, ce genre y est cultivé avec autant de succès qu'aucun autre. Il y a peu de maîtres dans ce talent qui ayent été beaucoup supérieurs aux peintres de paysage qui jouissent aujourd'hui en Angleterre de la première réputation."[1]

[1] 'L'Etat des Arts en Angleterre,' par M. Rouquet, p. 92.

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH.

CHAPTER I.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

TRAVELLERS by the line between Haverhill and Sudbury pass through some of the sweetest rural scenery in England. The valley of the Stour is alike remarkable for its beauty and its fertility. In the latter respect it may be compared with the rich luxuriance of the valleys of the Nile. The heaviest wheat and the brightest barley that the world can produce is grown in this district. The Stour is a sluggish stream but it is a favourite with anglers. The "greedy pike" basks in its shallows and lies secure in its deep holes, covered overhead with the rich foliage of the yellow and the white water-lily. The perch grows fat on the minnows which swarm in the throat of each little tributary that loses itself in the lazy river. The roach in shoals roam up and down its reaches and lurk in the reedy fringe of its banks or among the thick bulrushes. The wary tench is found there and an abundance of eels. At short intervals the stifled roar of the "undershot" water-mill tells the angler of lively water in the mill-pool, and tyro indeed must he be in the "gentle art" if he cannot fill his creel before the moorhen pipes her shrill

croak for her evening meal. It was on the banks of this river, at the little town of Sudbury, that Thomas Gainsborough was born in the year 1727, which would be three years after the birth of Richard Wilson, the father of English landscape painting.

The exact day of his birth is not known, but it must have been some time in the spring, for he was baptized in the Independent Meeting House at Sudbury on the 14th of May. His father, Mr. John Gainsborough, seems to have been a man whom many loved and all may admire. He must have changed his trade more than once, being described in 1722 as a "milliner," in 1725 as a "clothier," and in 1735 as a "crape maker." He maintained and educated with credit and comfort a family of five sons and four daughters. He had a good and well established connection, and seems to have been a man of enterprise and resource, for he introduced into Sudbury the shroud trade, in which Coventry had formerly enjoyed a monopoly. He was a fine old man, very particular about the parting of his hair, and remarkable for the regularity and whiteness of his teeth. His demeanour was grave, and the simple country folk used to regard him with awe, hinting that concealed beneath his cloak he always carried some deadly weapons. He was a skilled fencer, and possessed the knack of using his weapon in either hand. He might, perhaps, have become wealthy, but his great kindness of heart rendered him unwilling to press a defaulting debtor and sadly adverse to setting in motion the myrmidons of the law. This amiable weakness becoming notorious, bad debts multiplied and profits diminished. To his honour it should be recorded that he steadily refused to receive "toll," an iniquitous *black mail* then generally levied in the trade, and amounting to nearly one-third of the spinners' earnings. In religion he was an Independent, and if he sometimes did a little traffic in contraband goods—for which his occasional trips to Holland on legitimate business gave him many facilities—we must remember that in those days smuggling, so far from being considered morally

culpable, was almost regarded as a meritorious act. Fulcher has an amusing story to tell of the manner in which Mr. Gainsborough once routed an extremely weak-minded Revenue Officer. That zealous official stopped the old gentleman's cart one night at a short distance from Sudbury, and not unreasonably suspecting him of carrying some brandy and other contraband articles, stoutly demanded to see what he had in his cart. "I'll show you," was the ready answer, and catching up a shroud he enveloped his tall figure in the ghostly dress, to the astonishment and speedy departure of his weak-nerved visitor.

Mr. Gainsborough died in 1748 at the age of sixty-five.

Mrs. Gainsborough, the artist's mother, was a woman of much refinement and cultivation. She excelled in the graceful art of flower-painting, and it was doubtless she who with tender affection guided Tom's baby hand to trace his first outline. In one respect she was more fortunate than her husband, for she lived to see the public recognition of that artistic genius which both husband and wife had been quick to perceive and prompt to encourage. She was a kind and indulgent mother, proud of her children and of her family, which was "of old standing, well to live and of unblemished reputation." Her sons were all distinguished above their companions by their talents. Her maiden name was Burroughs, and she was the sister of the Rev. Humphrey Burroughs, curate of St. Gregory's, Sudbury, and Head Master of the Grammar School. She died in 1769, when her son was in high repute at Bath, and she is buried in the Independent Cemetery at Sudbury.

John Gainsborough, the eldest son, familiarly and somewhat disrespectfully known in the neighbourhood of Sudbury as "Scheming Jack," was an eccentric genius, much given to theories and experiments and the construction of models, an occupation which absorbed all his time and most of the money he contrived to get hold of. He was never successful at anything, for whatever he did—whether he tried to discover the philosopher's stone, —or to invent wings which should enable men to fly in the air, or

to construct a time-piece which would correct the longitude, or a self-working cradle, or a wheel that turned in a still bucket of water—nothing was ever completed so as to become profitable to the inventor. "Curse it," was the schemer's way of putting it, "some little thing was wrong; if I had but gone on with it I am sure I should have succeeded, but a new scheme came across me." After his death a stupendous collection of brass and tin models of every size and form was discovered in his house at Sudbury, but most of them *were in an unfinished state.*

Humphrey, the second brother, became an Independent minister, and settled at Henley-on-Thames. He also possessed great mechanical skill and taste. Indeed, it is stated with some good authority that he was the real inventor of that form of the steam-engine for which Watts obtained a patent in 1769. His favourite scientific pursuits do not appear to have hindered the faithful discharge of his duties, and the zeal and efficiency which he displayed elicited an offer, from some influential personage in the neighbourhood, of Church preferment, if he would consent to take Holy Orders. But he declined the offer. The circumstances of his death from heart disease were very tragic. He had an engagement to dine with a friend, who finding that he had not arrived at the appointed time, went out to meet him and found his dead body by the road-side. The artist was much attached to this excellent and accomplished man, and has left us a portrait of him which is worthy of his genius and reputation.

Of the painter's remaining brothers there is little to be said. Matthias died in boyhood from an accident. Robert migrated to Lancashire, and nothing of the smallest interest is recorded of him. Gainsborough's four sisters were all married—Mary to Mr. Gibbon, a dissenting minister at Bath; Susannah to Mr. Gardiner of the same city; Sarah to Mr. Dupont of Sudbury; and Elizabeth to Mr. Bird, also a Sudbury worthy.

As appears to have been the case with all truly great artists, Thomas Gainsborough's art was born in him. From the time he was able to toddle about he commenced to observe nature and

to love her; and in after years he was wont to say that "there was not a picturesque clump of trees, nor even a single tree of any beauty, nor hedge-row, stem or post" for miles around his home that was not perfectly imprinted on his boyhood's mind, so that had he possessed the necessary executive power he could have reproduced them with his pencil at any moment.

Round about Sudbury, the country (at that time more thickly wooded than now) is eminently calculated to stimulate a love for landscape. The scenery of the Stour valley, with its gently-rising banks, its emerald pastures, its lovely woodlands, and all the surroundings of rustic felicity, could never fail to charm a mind formed by nature to feed on the beautiful. Like Constable he used gratefully to acknowledge, in after years, that these scenes made him a painter. He has affectionately portrayed these loved haunts of his boyhood in several pictures, as in *A view of Henny Church; a Woody Scene (Cornard, near Sudbury);* and *A view near Sudbury.*

The town of Sudbury is of respectable antiquity and full of interest. At that day it consisted of unpaved streets, and contained many quaint, ancient, and frequently dilapidated buildings, with overlapping stories which overshadowed the thoroughfare. It was in these houses that the Flemish weavers brought over by Edward III. had lived and taught their art to the former natives of Sudbury, which, by the way, was not called Sudbury in those days, but Southburgh, by way of contrast with Norwich, the Northburgh. Not the least picturesque of these houses was that in which Gainsborough was born, which had formerly been an inn, known by the sign of *The Black Horse.* Here and there in the town, heavy picturesque porches, projecting far out from the main buildings to which they were adjuncts, were ornamented with "antediluvian monsters and zoology-defying griffins," all manner of cunningly carved impossibilities. In a niche in the chancel wall of St. Gregory, a grim stone head of Simon Sudbury, erstwhile Archbishop of Canterbury, had for generations looked down upon all passers

by; and hard by stood the ruins of the unfortunate prelate's palace[1] (then used as a poor-house), presenting, with its old Gothic arches and the crumbling tracery of its ruined windows festooned with delicate ivy tendrils, an appearance of picturesque decay. Amid such objects were Gainsborough's early years spent, and it is likely that not only his attention but his pencil also was engaged upon them from a very tender age. Like many other great artists, he began his art education very early in life—early enough indeed, if, as Allan Cunningham says, "At ten years old he had made some progress in sketching, and at twelve was a confirmed painter." Before he was yet ten years old he was placed at his uncle's Grammar School, where, instead of employing his time in toilsome effort to acquire the learning of the schools, he employed himself in making sketches of persons and places on the covers of his books and the backs of his exercises; much to the delight of his schoolfellows, who worked out his sums and wrote out his exercises for him.

Little Tom did not make any very great progress with his book learning, as might be expected under the circumstances. Like Constable, however, he showed great proficiency in handwriting, and this skill he once utilized for his own advantage in the following way. Master Tom much preferred freedom and fresh air to the confinement of the school-room, and he would occasionally coax his parents to give him a holiday, which he would spend in rambling about the neighbourhood filling his sketch-book. Having one day unsuccessfully begged his father to give him this treat, Tom thought perhaps he could arrange the matter diplomatically; so he wrote out the usual form of note, "Please give Tom a holiday," and imitated his father's handwriting so cleverly that Mr. Burroughs was completely deceived, and the juvenile forger started off for a glorious afternoon, returning in the evening probably with all sorts of sketches of woodland scenery,

[1] Simon Sudbury was beheaded by Wat Tyler's rabble.

"Clumps of trees and winding glades,
Sunny nooks and running water."

But, such is the malignity of fate, during the day his father desiring his presence had sent to the school for him, and so the forgery was detected. It was thus probably old Gainsborough, after a somewhat rude fashion, first learnt that he had a son who was a genius. When the irate parent was shown the cleverly forged letter he exclaimed, "Tom will one day be hanged," but when the gentle mother dexterously substituted the little truant's marvellously clear sketches, paternal pride and affection overcame his anger, and he declared that Tom would one day be a genius.

Very convinced, indeed, must his parents and schoolmates have been that little Tom possessed native genius of no ordinary calibre, for after many solemn family consultations, to which Uncle Burroughs and his wife (who, by the way, was a daughter of the celebrated Dr. Busby) were doubtless invited, it was decided to send him to London, he being then in his fifteenth year. We say that they were doubtless deeply impressed with his powers, because Art was considered, and was, a very hazardous profession to undertake in those days. So in 1741 he was sent to the great city, and placed under the care of a worthy silversmith, through whose influence and kindness he obtained an introduction to Gravelot an engraver, and teacher of drawing, who at once recognized the abilities of the youthful aspirant, and obtained for him admission to the St. Martin's Lane Academy. Under Gravelot he obtained some valuable instruction, particularly in etching. Most of Gainsborough's biographers say that he only etched three prints, viz. "one for his friend Kirby's work on Perspective; the second, *An oak tree with gipsies;* and the third, *A man ploughing on the side of a rising ground.*" Fulcher, however, points out that this is an erroneous statement, and says that he inspected "drawings from fifteen prints, designed and engraved by Gainsborough, and representing other subjects than those enumerated."

For three years he drudged away at the St. Martin's Lane Academy assisted by roystering Frank Hayman, the historical painter, for he had now attached himself to his studio in order to learn the mysteries and practices of his art. Hayman was a man of great reputation, but on the whole his pupil must have profited little by the connection, acquiring from him, as Fulcher says, "little of painting and less of morality." He was more addicted to dissipation, wine, and pugilism than to Art. Still he was clever in the mechanical processes and manipulative tricks. It does not matter so very much, after all, who happens to have been the instructor of any great artist. In the case of Wilson and some of his pupils we have an instance of the impossibility of manufacturing an *artist*, even when a truly great master takes the matter in hand. In Gainsborough the fire of genius was already existent, and it would be as reasonable to say that the preceptor who taught Alfred Tennyson prosody and grammar gave the world 'In Memoriam' as that Hayman taught Gainsborough how to paint *The Cottage Girl* or *The Woodman in the Storm*.

Whilst studying at the St. Martin's Lane Academy he fell slightly under the influence of the Flemish masters. During these years he was exposed to many temptations, and it was the most malleable period of his life. He must have seen far more of the dissipation and excesses into which Hayman and his boon companions plunged than was good and safe for a lad of his age. But he worked hard and earnestly, never flinching before seemingly insurmountable difficulties, until at last he began to feel strong enough to walk alone. Then he hired three rooms in Hatton Garden, where, whilst waiting for customers to come and have their portraits painted, he did a little modelling, and produced a few small landscapes. The latter he sold to the dealers for whatever he could get; for his portraits, which were of a small size, he charged from three to five guineas. But, as yet, there was no patronage to spare for him; sitters were few and far between; the picture-dealers ground him down till he would



THE BROOK. BY THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH.

bear with them no longer; and after a year's experience of Hatton Garden and public apathy, he packed up his belongings and wended his way back to Sudbury. He had now extracted all the goodness obtainable from the dried husks of insipid conventionalities which passed current in those days for the grammar of Art.

On his return to Sudbury in 1745 he set up there as a portrait painter, occasionally also painting a small landscape for the dealers. It is worthy of remark that these landscapes exhibit in a marked degree the influence of Gainsborough's London training. They are all in the style of the Dutch landscapists, and it was not until he had unlearnt the instruction he had been saturated with, and had become strong enough to paint Nature as she is, as he saw her, and knew her, and loved her, that he painted the pictures that entitle him to rank with Wilson and other masters.

At this period he seems to have been undaunted by his want of success in London; he had plighted his troth to Art, and to her he meant to devote his life. But as a provincial painter he thought he had a better chance of making a good start in life, than by remaining amongst the firmly-established "stars" of the London artistic world, and struggling with a crowd of hungry aspirants for fame. Above all he would be able to paint now face to face with Nature—not the false Nature of the Haymans and the studios. So he did wisely in relinquishing the bare possibility of being caught up by Fortune's wheel, and the probability of exciting some hostility and then being left to starve in a garret, the ordinary fate of those who are in any way "deadly true." And more than this, in learning the grammar and mechanism of his art he had, as we have said, imbibed a touch of conventionalism which he could now shake off. So he did wisely and well in returning to his rural home in the sweet valley of the Stour. He was now in his eighteenth year. During his stay in London he had acquired a manner that to the inhabitants of Sudbury represented the highest possible degree of polish and

elegance. Bright, witty, vivacious in his conversation, elegant in his bearing, and, with all his advantages, modest in the extreme, no wonder that his society was eagerly courted. But he did not give himself up to social enjoyment, for he knew that as yet he had only learnt *how* to study; he was constantly employed in sketching and painting in the open air.

"The Suffolk ploughmen often saw him in the early morning, sketchbook in hand,

'brushing with hasty steps the dew away,'

and lingering in the golden light of evening taking lessons from the sunset clouds floating in changeful beauty as if an angel's hand had traced the scene."[1]

On one occasion, when painting a lovely scene that might have been taken from fairy land, looking up after a few moments' abstraction from his easel, he beheld a most lovely damsel emerging from behind some trees on whose branches wood-doves were perched and beneath the shade of which some sheep were reposing. He at once fell a victim to the lady's beauty and sweetness; and she, who happened to be a princess in disguise, was conquered by his devotion and elegance, and forthwith surrendered her heart and her fortune into his keeping. They were married, and lived happily together for ever after. This charming idyl, for long taken as an accurate account of the painter's wooing and marriage, is, unfortunately for the lovers of romance, a somewhat highly-coloured narrative. The princess in disguise, one year Gainsborough's junior, was a young lady named Margaret Burr, concerning whose parentage there is much mystery. Some say that she was the natural daughter of one of our exiled princes, but in the 'Diary of a Lover of Literature'[2] she is spoken of as a natural daughter of the Duke of Bedford. Her fortune took the shape of an annuity of £200 a year, whence emanating none could say apparently, but it was regularly paid to her account at a London bank. Her brother was a traveller in old Mr. Gains-

[1] Fulcher, 'Life of Thomas Gainsborough,' p. 32. London, 1856.
[2] Thomas Green.

borough's employ, and it is therefore probable that she and Tom had been friends and playmates for years. It was not whilst he was sketching that Miss Burr's great beauty first struck him, but during the many sittings which she gave him for her portrait. But, however it came about, the love was there, and in 1745 the boy-husband led his girl-bride to the altar, and a sweet, faithful, and prudent wife she proved. After a brief residence in Friar Street, Sudbury, they removed to Ipswich, and settled down to love in a cottage, for which the rent was £6 a year.

Ipswich did not much affect the fine arts in 1745. If she do so now, the change must have been comparatively recent. In Gainsborough's early days the Ipswichians were essentially practical and business-like people. To their minds the finest scenery in the neighbourhood was to be found amongst the blocks of warehouses on their wharves; they admired the masts of the vessels that glided with their merchandise on the bosom of the stately Orwell far beyond any woodland trees; and the leaves of their broad ledgers were to them far dearer than any leaves in the forest. From such people Gainsborough was not likely to receive much patronage, and when at last a wealthy squire did send for him our painter found to his unutterable disgust, on calling to receive his instructions, that *a painter and glazier* was wanted to paint the outside of a house and repair some broken windows and hothouse frames. But he did not put his hands in his pockets and remain content to wait and hope only; he kept on working—for ever sketching, studying, and painting Nature in the open air. Every single part of her he made a study of; he knew her in all her changeful moods. Of some water-colour drawings of this period two are studies simply illustrative of the effect of sunbeams piercing through clouds. It was whilst sketching near Freston Tower, on the banks of the Orwell, that a sober-looking gentleman casually introduced himself to Gainsborough as *Joshua Kirby*. The acquaintance thus formed ripened into a warm friendship, and at Kirby's death, in 1771,

Gainsborough deeply mourned his loss, and expressed his desire to be buried, when his time should come, by the side of his old friend.

In 1754 it was that Gainsborough met Philip Thicknesse, who had recently been appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Landguard Fort, near Harwich. Thicknesse was walking in a friend's garden when he saw a melancholy-faced man with his arms locked together, looking over the boundary wall. The friend, whose attention Thicknesse directed to the object, said that the figure had been there all day, and that the man was probably mad or else miserable. Thicknesse then went up to the figure, when he found that what he had taken to be a man was a shaped and painted panel. On hearing that the artist (Gainsborough) lived in the town, Thicknesse lost no time in calling, and being introduced into his painting-room, upbraided him for imposing upon people a shadow for a substance. At this interview, Thicknesse mentions having seen several portraits, including one of Admiral Vernon, "truly drawn, perfectly like, but stiffly painted, and worse coloured."

His little landscapes, however, are described as charming works of fancy, affording to beholders infinite delight. For these landscapes, we may observe parenthetically, Gainsborough charged from three to five guineas each. Soon after the commencement of their acquaintanceship, Thicknesse commissioned Gainsborough to paint a landscape of the Yachts passing the garrison under the salute of the guns. This work, for which Gainsborough received fifteen guineas, was soon afterwards taken to London by its purchaser and engraved by Major. The engraving represents a S.E. view of Landguard Fort, which being a most unpicturesque structure is wisely made to occupy but a very small portion of the landscape. The foreground is relieved by various groups of figures and cattle, remarkable for their ease and grace. The original picture perished long before the painter's death, sea-water having been used for the mortar of the wall on which it was hung. The engraving helped much to

spread the artist's reputation far beyond the limited circle in which he had hitherto been known.

Thicknesse, who from 1754 to 1774 devoted himself with untiring assiduity to Gainsborough's affairs, was a man on whom nearly every sketcher of the painter's life has heaped so much abuse and contempt that we will only say he appears to have been a fussy, ostentatious, irrepressible busybody without the faintest conception of modesty, and seems, also, to have entertained some notion that he had a sort of heaven-born right to patronize Gainsborough. On the other hand, he describes himself as a "very innocent and unoffending man except to rogues and rascals."

During the early period of their acquaintance the two men seem to have got on very well together. Thicknesse lent Gainsborough a violin, which the latter soon learnt to play better than the owner. And though we smile at the Governor's modest assertion that he "was the first man who perceived through clouds of bad colouring, what an accurate eye he (Gainsborough) possessed, and the truth of his drawings, and who dragged him from the obscurity of a country town at a time that all his neighbours were as ignorant of his great talent as he was himself," it is probable that Thicknesse was kindly influential in obtaining some commissions ; and in a small place like Ipswich an acquaintance more or less would make a great difference in a man's social circle. During his career in Suffolk Gainsborough was chiefly employed in painting portraits of the wives and daughters of the people living round Ipswich ; and at Colchester he had some patrons, one of whom, Mr. Edgar, a lawyer, it seems, gave him a sitting before the painter knew much about him ; for in a letter from Gainsborough, dated 13th March, 1758, to this gentleman, is the following passage :

"I little thought you were a lawyer when I said that not one in ten was worth hanging. I told Clubb of that, and he seemed to think that I was lucky that I did not say one in a hundred. It's too late to ask your pardon now, but really, Sir, I never saw

one of your profession look so honest in my life, and that's the reason I concluded you were in the wool trade."

At this time he sometimes sketched the parks and mansions of the neighbouring gentry, but there was then very little demand for landscape paintings—at least not for English landscapes. On the whole, however, he made a very comfortable living; his society was eagerly sought, and he was hospitably received at many houses in the neighbourhood, amongst others at that of the Rev. Mr. Hingeston of Southwold, with whom he was a great favourite. His affable and agreeable manners endeared him to all with whom he came in contact, alike at the cottage and the castle. Long after he had left that part of the country, at mention of his name the countenances of the aged peasants would brighten up with a grateful recollection of his many acts of benevolence and kindness. He delighted in presenting friends with memorials of his skill, and the panels of several of the rooms in Mr. Hingeston's house were adorned with the productions of his genius. One of these especially, a landscape in Gainsborough's most felicitous style, in which the artist's two daughters Margaret and Mary are introduced chasing a butterfly, is a most charming description of one of the happiest aspects of nature.

As a diversion from painting he cultivated music; and occasionally gave concerts at his own house. One of his pictures represents himself and several of the members of a musical club in Ipswich to which he belonged. In the foreground stand Gainsborough and his friend Captain Clarke, their heads turned towards a violin player who is accompanied by another player on the violoncello—in the centre of the room is a table at which a fifth figure is sleeping—probably intended for a sarcastic hint as to the quality of the music. It is a candlelight scene; Gainsborough has a glass in his hand; two other figures are on the table, and the third has rolled upon the floor temporarily in the condition of the gentleman described in one of Bret Harte's poems, of whom it is recorded that "the subsequent proceedings interested him no more." From this picture, and from the

fact that an ancient Ipswichian once told somebody that Gainsborough and his companions were "pretty boys in their day," it has been suggested that the artist's habits were somewhat too convivial. We have purposely mentioned this that we may state our total disagreement with any such conclusion; our imagination is not sufficiently fertile to enable us to picture the gentle, refined Gainsborough as a roysterer, and we never saw any evidence of his being more than a thoroughly sociable man, able and willing to enjoy the good things of the world in a legitimate and decorous way.

Undoubtedly Gainsborough would have been well content to end his days at Ipswich, where he was now comfortably settled, and had spent fifteen years in his cottage of content, years of such pure happiness as fall to the lot of few of us. He was well known through all the country round, and had some pupils—certainly two, of whom one was the son of his friend Joshua Kirby. But in the eternal fitness of things it was not meet that so great a genius should remain unknown to a larger world.

Thicknesse had a house and good social standing at Bath, than which, except London, no city then offered greater advantages for a portrait painter. To have their portraits taken has been a peculiar temptation to idle people with money in their pockets ever since the art of portrait painting became known, and there were many idle and frivolous, but wealthy people at Bath. Beau Nash, who had in his halcyon days rendered the fair "Queen of the West" the resort of all the fashionable world, was there spending his old age in such glory as the office of Master of the Ceremonies afforded, and he still gathered around him all the wit and wealth and fashion of the day.

Hither Thicknesse advised and prevailed upon Gainsborough to move. Of course the painter could not live amongst the butterflies of fashion in the same humble style in which he had been so happy in Ipswich, so he took apartments in the newly-erected Circus at a rental of £50 a year—much to his prudent wife's alarm, who asked him if he were going to throw himself

into a gaol; but Thicknesse, who,—when not patronizing,—played the part of a family *fidus Achates*, explained that the only alternative to this arrangement would be to take a house at £150 a year, and he even offered to pay the rent of such a house if Gainsborough were unable to do so, so confident was he of the artist's success. There was little cause for anxiety, however, for from the very first business came in so fast that Gainsborough had no leisure to finish a head of Thicknesse commenced and intended to have been used as an advertisement or decoy duck to allure the visitors to have their portraits taken. The "painter in the Circus" was spoken of in the public rooms as a "*clever fellow who could paint a head as well as Mr. Hoare;*"[1] he was obliged, in order to keep his patrons within manageable numbers, to raise his charge from five to eight guineas for a head; and finally he settled them at forty guineas for a half-length and one hundred guineas for a full-length portrait, and so prosperously did he thrive that his house was christened *Gain's Borough.*

Since Gainsborough had left London public interest in modern works of art had shown symptoms of awakening, and one of the good results had been the foundation of the Society of Artists in 1764, and the establishment of the Royal Academy in 1768, the former body being the immediate outcome of the exhibition of pictures held under the auspices of the Royal Society of Arts, the first of which was in 1760. To this Gainsborough did not contribute; but the following year he sent to London a full-length *Portrait of Mr. Nugent;* and at the subsequent exhibitions till 1768 inclusive, fifteen portraits and two landscapes from his brush were hung. Among these may be mentioned *Portraits of General Honywood, Quin, Garrick, Lady Grosvenor, Duke of Argyll*, and *Mr. Poyntz;* a *Large Landscape* (1763); and a *Large Landscape with Figures*

[1] William Hoare, one of the original R.A.s, was also a Suffolk man, having been born at Eye in 1706. After a very complete art education in this country and on the continent he settled at Bath as a portrait painter. His productions are now forgotten.



THE YOUNG LAVINIA.

By Gainsborough.

Painted for Macklin's "British Poets.

(1766). Quin was extremely unwilling to allow his portrait to be painted, and it was only at Gainsborough's appeal, "If you will let me take your likeness, I shall live for ever," that he consented. Garrick at first played such pranks with his countenance that the poor artist was puzzled how to make any likeness at all, for at one moment the actor had a horrible squint, the next he appeared "as handsome as Lord Townshend;" now the distracted painter saw in his sitter an old man with a bloated face, and in a moment the figure changed, and presented "the pinched aspect and withered features of Sir John Hawkins." In all probability, however, Garrick merely desired to gratify his vanity by a display of his marvellous gift of mimicry, and wished perhaps to relieve the tediousness of a lengthy sitting. Certainly the portrait proved a great success, and Mrs. Garrick pronounced it to be "the best portrait ever painted of her Davy." Garrick sufficiently approved of it to present it to the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon. But by far the most important of these portraits was that of General Honywood. This is one of Gainsborough's finest pictures: "Through a richly wooded scene, where the sturdy oak and silvery-barked beech are conspicuous, the soldier, mounted on a bay horse, appears to be passing. His scarlet dress contrasts finely with the mass of surrounding foliage. Nothing can be easier than his attitude, as with one hand he curbs in his charger, and with the other holds his sword, which seems to flash in the sunbeams."

When George III. saw this picture, he admired it so much that he wished to become the possessor, and Horace Walpole marked it in his catalogue as one of the features of the Exhibition.

In 1767 and the following year Gainsborough sent five paintings to the Artists' Exhibition. They were *Portraits of Lady Grosvenor; John, Duke of Argyle; Mr. Vernon; Captain Needham;* and *Captain Augustus Hervey.* By no means the least appreciative of our painter's Bath admirers was Mr. Wiltshire, the carrier between that city and London, whose homage to Gainsborough's genius took the form of refusing to take any

payment for the transport of the Academy pictures to and from London. The two were great friends, and Gainsborough presented Wiltshire with several paintings, which have been religiously preserved in the carrier's family as heirlooms.

Wiltshire, in return, gave Gainsborough a horse which the latter had greatly admired, and which served as a model for many pictures. Amongst others, it figures in *The Return from Harvest*, a present to Mr. Wiltshire. A little peasant girl seated in a waggon, the driver of which is stopping his team in order to allow another little lass to mount; the children are portraits of the painter's daughters.

Gainsborough's passion for music grew with his years, and at times it seemed as if painting were his diversion and music the business of his life. Once he heard Giardini play the violin, and became so enamoured of the music that he insisted upon buying the identical instrument from which he had heard the enchanting tones produced.

Then Abel came to Bath with his viol-di-gamba, and Gainsborough must needs buy it. Then he heard Fischer play the hautboy, and he swore by wind instruments. Then Crosdill played the violoncello at a concert where Gainsborough was, and the painter could talk of nothing else for a month. One day he was shown a picture by his favourite Van Dyck, in which a lute was introduced, and a lute he *must* have. He heard that such an instrument was owned by a German professor, to whose residence he immediately repaired, and found the professor in a garret, smoking his pipe after a dinner of roasted apples. The following conversation then took place. It is thoroughly characteristic of the impetuous and boyish nature of Gainsborough.

"I have come to buy your lute; name your price and I will pay it."

"I cannot sell my lute."

"Not for a guinea or two, perhaps, but you *must* sell at some price and so I tell you."

"My lute is worth much money—ten guineas."

"Indeed it is—quite that; see, here's your money. Good day." Then taking up the instrument and placing the ten guineas on the table Gainsborough left the room; but before he had got half-way down the stairs, he returned, and said—

"I have forgotten something. What is your lute to me if I have not your book of airs?"

"Ah, Master Gainsborough, I cannot part with my book."

"Nonsense; you can make another at any time. See, here's the book I want—and here's another ten guineas for it."

Once more did the impetuous painter-musician withdraw, but only for a few seconds, when back he came.

"Dear me, what is the use of your book to me if I don't understand it, or of your lute if I cannot play on it? Come home with me at once and give me the first lesson."

"I will go to-morrow."

"Come now."

"I must dress."

"You are admirably dressed."

"I must shave."

"I honour your beard."

"I must, however, put on my wig."

"D—n your wig, your cap and beard become you well enough. Do you think if Van Dyck wanted to paint you he'd let you be shaved? Come on at once."

Gainsborough's connection with the Royal Academy is somewhat obscure. His residence at Bath and the difference between the means of communication then and now might have occasioned the omission of his name from the directorate of the pioneer Incorporated Society, though his works at the previous exhibitions ought to have marked him as a giant among painters. Of this Society, too, his old master, Frank Hayman, was vice-president, and Francis Cotes, who must have met Gainsborough at Bath, was a director. It is curious, too, that Gainsborough's name was not included in either of the two lists of original

members submitted for George III.'s approval; though R.A. is appended to his name in the first catalogue. "It is evident," says Mr. Tom Taylor, "that there was a determination to secure him for the new Academy; and that he let himself be secured, but he seems never to have taken any part whatever in the work of the Academy, and his membership is hardly traceable in the Academy records, except by a quarrel, occasionally, about the hanging of his pictures."[1] It was the law of the Royal Academy that every member should signalize his election by presenting to the Institution one of his paintings. Gainsborough, who was one of the original thirty-six, contributed *A Romantic Landscape with Sheep at a Fountain.*

Between 1769 and 1773 Gainsborough sent, altogether, thirty-three works to the annual exhibitions, including whole length painting of *Isabella, Lady Molyneux;* portrait of *George Pitt,* eldest son of Lord Rivers; *A Large Landscape; A Boy's Head;* three-quarters length of *Garrick; Portrait of a Gentleman; Lady Sussex and Child; Lord Ligonier, with a Horse; Lady Ligonier, in a Fancy Dress; Captain Wade, M.C. at Bath.* It is well known that he sometimes painted his subjects to be viewed at a certain light and at a particular distance; in 1773 and the three following years he did not exhibit at all, being dissatisfied with the action of the authorities—probably his expressed wishes on the subject had been ignored by the Hanging Committee in 1772.

In 1775 the R.A. Council moved that Mr. Gainsborough's name be omitted from their lists, "he having declined to accept any office in the Academy, and never attending;" the motion was, however, rescinded at the next General Meeting. In 1777 Gainsborough again figures in the catalogue, and his name continues to appear as a large contributor down to 1783 inclusive. On April 24th, 1784, the following paragraph appeared in a London journal in explanation of a previous notification on the same subject: "Mr. Gainsborough's picture which the Royal

[1] Leslie's 'Life of Reynolds,' note on p. 297, vol. i.

Academy Inquisition has refused to hang agreeably to his wishes, contains the portraits of the *Princess Royal*, *Princess Augusta*, and *Princess Elizabeth*, at full length. It was painted for the Prince of Wales's state-room in Carlton Palace for a height already ascertained, as the frame which is to receive it is formed in the panels. The requisition the artist made, to hang it at the panel height in the Exhibition Room, ought surely to have been attended to in so particular an instance, particularly when it is remembered that the colouring is tender and delicate; so that the effect must be destroyed by an injudicious elevation." Gainsborough withdrew the whole of his pictures, and never again sent any contribution to the Exhibitions. It is well known that from the very first the Hanging Committee of the Academy were governed by certain inexorable rules, unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, one of which was that all full-length portraits must be hung in what is known as the "full-length line;" and though the relaxation of the rule in such a case as Gainsborough's need not, *per se*, have been attended with any detrimental result either to the other exhibitors or to the dignity of the Academy as a body, it is easy to see what reasons influenced the "Inquisition" in their decision. Intrigue, partisanship, jealousy, and favouritism were as rampant in artistic and all other circles in the eighteenth century as they are in the nineteenth and will be in the 190th century, and in order to maintain anything like authority over the many cliques and parties into which artists were divided, the Royal Academicians knew it was absolutely necessary to act with unswerving partiality. They felt their position should be like that of Cæsar's wife — above suspicion — and they therefore treated Gainsborough with exactly the same justice—harsh justice it may now appear—as they would have dealt out to any other painter. Reynolds in Gainsborough's place would have accepted the decision as a matter of business, have taken a pinch of snuff, and have painted a better portrait for the next Exhibition, intended to be viewed from the full-length line. But

Gainsborough was not a man of the world. Pettiness, jealousy, envy, and intrigue were things he had heard of but could not comprehend; and judging mankind by the standard of his own simple, innocent, kindly nature, he knew not the necessity for grappling with these noxious moral weeds, nor could he understand the means taken by the Academy to keep their own ground as clear as possible from such encumbrances. He could only put down the non-observance of his wishes with regard to the hanging of his pictures to inconsiderate obliviousness, or to non-appreciation of his genius. But if he misunderstood the Somerset House arbiters, we think that his biographers have misunderstood his action in this matter. In no case did he quarrel with his judges. Wrangling and dispute were so utterly foreign to his peaceable disposition that he retired altogether from the ground where he might have been drawn into angry discussion; and who shall say he was not wise to wish rather to enjoy the unruffled calm of domestic life with his lute and viol-de-gamba than to engage in angry recrimination in the avenging of an imaginary slight.

Whilst at Bath Gainsborough was not unmindful of his relations. His eldest sister with his approval was happily married to a Mr. Gibbon of Bath. He also took upon himself the rearing of a nephew, Gainsborough Dupont.[1] Richardson the novelist, Sterne, Chatterton (it is said), Cramer the metallurgist, and Lord Camden, besides Garrick and Quin, were amongst the many eminent personages whose portraits Gainsborough painted during his career at Bath. Here, too, he was a universal favourite in society, in which he freely mixed, and would often amuse his friends by modelling their faces in any material ready to his hand, the wax from the candles serving when nothing else could be had. In his profession he had been successful beyond his expectations, and it is probable he would

[1] Afterwards a portrait painter of considerable merit and much promise, during Gainsborough's life-time his assistant; and who, before his death at the age of thirty (in 1797), painted a picture containing the portraits of the Elder Brethren of the Trinity House, which was deservedly praised.

have remained at Bath for the rest of his life but for the irrepressible Thicknesse, who either from kindly motives or from inveterate officiousness, still continued a system of interference which began to be unendurable and amounted almost to persecution. But, as in the case of the removal from Ipswich, the change of residence to London proved to have been a wise step. In 1774 a wretched squabble took place between the Thicknesses and the Gainsboroughs. The painter had presented Mrs. Thicknesse with a portrait of herself, and she was desirous of possessing a companion one of her husband. Thicknesse, knowing the professional charge to be 100 guineas, and unwilling to accept so valuable a work without making some adequate return, made the painter a present, through his wife, of a very choice old viol-di-gamba (worth at least 100 guineas) which Gainsborough greatly coveted. The artist was delighted and gratefully promised Mrs. Thicknesse a portrait of her husband. One sitting was given, but for some cause or other the picture was then abandoned. Mrs. Thicknesse was mortally offended, and expressed herself to Gainsborough in uncompromisingly uncomplimentary terms; the painter returned the viol-di-gamba and sent the unfinished picture to Thicknesse, who returned it, however, requesting the painter to "blot it out, and then blot out from his heart the truest friend he had ever possessed." Without entering into any further details we may safely say that there seem to have been faults of temper and judgment on both sides. Certainly the explanation which the Gainsboroughs gave, that the artist not only undertook to paint the portrait, but also privately sent Mrs. Thicknesse a cheque for a hundred guineas as the price of the instrument, knowing that money would be acceptable at the time, does make Thicknesse's impatience and fussiness about the painting appear unreasonable, and would justify the artist's subsequent conduct. But Thicknesse in his angry pamphlet gave a contradictory account.

This squabble is said to have been the immediate cause of Gainsborough's leaving Bath, but independently of any one

particular episode, he was naturally glad of any excuse for running away from the fussy interference and patronage of such an arch-bore as Sir Philip Thicknesse.

So, in 1774, for a second time, Gainsborough set up in practice in London. But since he had relinquished the Hatton Garden studio, where sitters would not come in sufficient numbers to warrant his keeping it on, his position had vastly changed. In his Ipswich cottage he had made a sure living; in the comparatively pretentious Bath apartments he had more than prospered; and now, in the possession of a large income and a splendid name, he felt no hesitation in renting for £300 a-year from Astley (the portrait painter, who in former days had lined his waistcoat with "a waterfall" cut from one of his unhonoured landscapes, but had now made a short cut to fortune by marriage with a rich widow), part of Schomberg House, a noble mansion in Pall Mall. Thicknesse (to show that he nurtured no malice) wrote requesting Lord Bateman to give Gainsborough countenance and to *make him known*, a scarcely necessary proceeding, seeing that Gainsborough's pictures in the different Exhibitions since 1761 had attracted great attention and caused much interest to be taken in the painter of works which displayed such high merit. Reynolds, the President of the Academy, was one of the first to call upon him, but most unfortunately, Gainsborough had not been able to understand the real cause of the Hanging Committee's decision in 1772, and laid himself open to the charge of churlishness by neglecting to return the visit. George III. had noticed the beauty of Gainsborough's works, and sent for him to the palace; before long the king and queen sat for their portraits; nearly all the aristocracy followed the royal example; commissions fell in so fast that, rapid as was Gainsborough's execution, he was unable to keep pace with the demand upon his services. In December, 1774, he was elected on the Council of the Royal Academy, and actually received a vote for the Presidency—the Popedom of British Art.

In his ever-increasing prosperity he never forgot his poorer relations. Scheming Jack was not only supplied with money for expenses at Sudbury, but there were always warm welcome and comfortable quarters for him at Schomberg House. To his sister at Bath Gainsborough wrote affectionately, and was solicitous about her position and welfare; and it was in rambles with his brother Humphrey, amidst the Thames valley scenery, that he spent many of the few hours he was able to steal from his numerous engagements.

In 1777 Gainsborough reappeared at the Academy with the portraits of his friend *Abel*, the *Duke and Duchess of Cumberland; Lord Gage; Two Young Gentlemen;* and *A Large Landscape*, which Lord Orford said, was "in the style of Rubens, and by far the finest landscape ever painted in England, and equal to the great masters."

The following year Horace Walpole said of Gainsborough's *Duchess of Devonshire*, that it was "very hard and washy;" but then Lady Di Beauclerc had just before painted a portrait of her Grace, which had been engraved by Bartolozzi; and the dictator of Strawberry Hill, true to his orders, had resolved that Lady Di's *Duchess* should be *the* one of the season.

In this year Gainsborough was represented on the Academy walls with unusual profusion, as he contributed no less than eight portraits and two landscapes. Among the portraits was one of Christie the auctioneer, a present from the artist.

In 1779 Gainsborough was at the zenith of his fame. In that year he wrote: "My present position with regard to encouragement, etc., is all that heart can desire, and I live at a full thousand pounds a-year expense." The most eminent men in every walk of life sat to him; and those critics who had any discernment thought his landscapes were superior to his portraits. The favourite painter of the king and royal family, he was frequently at the palace, and amongst other commissions he was requested to make a portrait of one of the little princes who had just died.

It was about this time that the portrait of Master Buttall, known as *The Blue Boy*, was painted, as a practical refutation (it is said) of Reynolds' dictum, that in the masses of light in a picture, the cool colours should be subordinate to the azure tints. In several of Gainsborough's happiest portraits, however, he has shown that the cool colours may, with the most pleasing effect, predominate. This year Gainsborough exhibited *Portraits of the Duchess of Gloucester*, and *the Duchess of Cumberland*, with *half-lengths of Two Ladies, and Judge Perrin.* He also contributed a most impressive picture of *the Duke of Argyll.*

To the 1780 Exhibition, as we learn from a contemporary pamphlet entitled 'A Candid Review of the Exhibition,' Gainsborough sent six landscapes and nine or ten portraits, including paintings of *General Conway, Governor of Jersey; Henderson the Actor* studying a tragedy part; and *Mr. George Coyte.* The latter painting was so life-like that it became known as "Coyte alive." Among the portraits was one of Mr. Bate, who was then Editor of the 'Morning Post,' and afterwards became Sir Bate Dudley, Bart. A political opponent of Dudley speaking of a second portrait of him by the same artist, representing him standing in a garden with his dog, wittily but spitefully said that "the man wanted execution, and the dog wanted hanging."

It is strange that, whilst living, Gainsborough's popularity was almost entirely owing to his skill as a portrait painter. In eighteen years he had only sent half-a-dozen landscapes to the Exhibitions; the walls of the passage from his hall to his painting-room were covered with landscapes, which his visitors for the most part scarcely deigned to look at, and never thought of inquiring the price of. Even that splendid outcome of his genius, *The Woodman in the Storm*, painted in 1787, when powerful critics had dragged the public attention to his landscape art, was only *admired.* No purchaser could be found willing to pay a hundred guineas for it whilst the painter was alive; but directly he died it was snapped up by Lord Gainsborough at five times that price. But Gainsborough knew well his own land-



See Page 42.

THE BLUE BOY.

BY GAINSBOROUGH.

In the possession of the Duke of Westminster.

scape power, and in the next four years exhibited thirteen landscapes.

In 1781 appeared the *Portrait of Queen Charlotte*, of which a writer said: "I do believe that Opie would have made a calf's head look sensible, as Gainsborough made our old Queen Charlotte look picturesque;" also *Three Landscapes*, of two of which Walpole said: "Gainsborough has two pieces with land and sea, so free and natural that one steps back for fear of being splashed."

In 1782 he exhibited his *Girl and Pigs*, of which Northcote remarks, that "the expression and truth of nature it displays were never surpassed," and with which even the fastidious Sir Joshua could find no fault, merely expressing the very characteristic opinion that the artist should have made the girl a beauty. A very striking criticism of this painting is said to have emanated from a countryman, who remarked: "They be deadly like pigs, but nobody ever saw pigs feeding together but what one on 'em had a foot in the trough." It attracted the notice of Peter Pindar, who in his 'Ode to the Royal Academicians' devotes three stanzas to Gainsborough; in the last he counsels him to pursue his charming *forte*, and to have the "modest grace" to devote his attention to landscapes; and again he says—

> "O Gainsborough! Nature plaineth sore
> That thou hast kicked her out of door;
> * * * * * * *
> Lo! all thy efforts without her are vain,
> Go, find her, kiss her, and be friends again."

Gainsborough sent to the Academy in 1783, *A Landscape; Two Shepherd Boys with Fighting Dogs; A Sea-piece, a Calm;* and numerous portraits, including those of *Mrs. Sheridan, Lord Cornwallis, Duchess of Devonshire*, and *Sir Harbord Harbord.* This was the year in which he exhibited *Portraits of the Royal Family*, fifteen in number, but heads only. Peter Pindar made merry over this picture, describing it as "a nest of royal heads."

The portraits of *Colonel St. Leger*, painted in 1782, and *Sir Harbord Harbord*, contributed to the Academy in the following year, are among the finest of Gainsborough's paintings, the former being equal to the celebrated picture of *General Honywood*, and resembling it in many respects.

About 1784 Gainsborough painted the *Mushroom Girl*. The subject is fanciful—a rustic girl, wearied of her occupation of gathering mushrooms, is sleeping beneath an elm tree with her head resting upon her arms. A peasant is gazing at the sleeping beauty with evident admiration, whilst a little terrier looks indignantly at the intruder, but fears to bark lest he should wake his mistress. Gainsborough once offered his nephew, Mr. Dupont, the choice of any of his pictures, and he selected this unfinished one.

The *View in the Mall of St. James's Park* is a charming picture, painted in the year 1786. Amongst some twenty figures which it contains is a portrait of the artist himself. Fulcher describes it as "brilliant in colouring, charming in composition, and more than usually careful in execution."

The Cottage Girl with her Dog and Pitcher, which Leslie so much admires, was painted from the same young lady depicted in the *Girl and Pigs*.

Whether the verses of the burly satirist Wolcot hit their mark, or whether from other causes, after the close of this Exhibition Gainsborough resolved to rest for a while from the fatigues of portrait painting, and to refresh his mind and body by an excursion to the Lake district. In this tour, however, he did not intend to let his brush grow stiff, for he wrote to a friend that on his return he meant showing that all the delineators of our Lake scenery had, as hitherto, been but "tawdry fan painters."

"I purpose," said he, "to mount all the Lakes at the next Exhibition in the great style—and if the people don't like them, it is only jumping into one of the deepest from off a wooded island, and my reputation will be fixed for ever."

But at the next Exhibition the public saw neither the Lake scenes nor anything else from the great artist's easel. In consequence of the disagreement about the hanging of the *Princesses* to which we have referred, Gainsborough withdrew all his pictures, and till his death he was afterwards only remembered at the Spring gatherings by his absence.

Fischer, the hautboy player and friend of Gainsborough, had secretly wooed the painter's youngest daughter. When, in 1780, Gainsborough's consent to their union was asked, he said that it was then too late to alter anything without causing total unhappiness on both sides, though he had serious misgivings, on account of Fischer's oddities and temper, as to the desirability of the match. The marriage did not turn out a happy one, for before long Mrs. Fischer's mental aberrations rendered a separation necessary. In spite of Fischer's "oddities and temper," Gainsborough found in him a congenial companion; and these two would often leave their wives to their own resources for a whole evening, while, the one with his flageolet and the other with his viol-di-gamba, they would become so engrossed and wrapped up in their music that for aught they knew the house might have been broken into and cleared. Music enthralled Gainsborough more than ever; once when Colonel Hamilton, considered one of the finest violinists of the day, was playing to him, Nollekens entered the studio. Gainsborough put up his hand as a sign not to interrupt, and as soon as the air was finished he said, "Now, my dear Colonel, if you will but go on I will give you that picture of the *Boy at the Stile* you have so wished to purchase of me," at the same time telling Nollekens to select two drawings for himself from a portfolio. For nearly half an hour Gainsborough's attention was rivetted to the music, and then the Colonel drove off in a hackney-coach with his easily earned prize.

The musical accessories in Gainsborough pictures are always painted with a loving care; take the portrait of Fischer, for example, in whose face we can see the music breathing,

painted at Bath; the violin is perfect; the polish on the Cremona denotes how lovingly the instrument has been preserved; whilst the maker's name even is not forgotten on the piano.

Gainsborough's impulsive ways sometimes give rise to embarrassing results. On first seeing Velasquez' picture of the young Duke of Asturias, he said to a servant of Mr. Agar, the possessor, "Go and tell your master I'll give a thousand pounds for that picture." The servant did as he was told. But by that time Gainsborough's enthusiasm had become tempered with common sense, and he was forced to admit he could not afford to pay such a fancy price.

His favourite suburban retreat for the summer months was Richmond, where he had a cottage. There were few poor people in the neighbourhood strangers to his generosity and benevolence; and when in his rambles he met any particularly picturesque-looking peasant children, he would send them off at once to his painting-room, and the remuneration he lavished on children and parents on such occasions was bountiful. He was so taken with the appearance of one lad, John Hill,[1] that he actually adopted him; and though the boy, after a short experience, elected to run away and enjoy the freedom of his native lanes and fields rather than conform to the unaccustomed refinements of the painter's household, he was, after the latter's death in 1788, provided for by Mrs. Gainsborough with an admission into Christ's Hospital.

In the early months of 1787, Sir George Beaumont, Sheridan, and Gainsborough dined together; the latter excelled himself in sparkling wit, brilliant conversation, and conspicuous cheerfulness. So delightful was the party, that another such meeting was arranged for an early date. But when the day came and the three friends were met, a strange change was seen in Gainsborough. He was utterly different from the Gainsborough of their

[1] The painter has painted this handsome lad in the pictures, *Jack Hill, in a Cottage; Jack Hill, with his Cat, in a Wood.*

recent merry meeting. He was despondent and gloomy, and sat in silence, with a look of fixed melancholy which neither witticisms nor raillery could dissipate. At last he took Sheridan apart and led him out of the room. Outside the door he said: "Now, don't laugh, but listen. I shall die soon; I know it—I feel it. I have less time to live than my looks infer—but for this I care not. What oppresses my mind is this. I have many acquaintances and few friends; and as I wish to have one worthy man to accompany me to the grave, I am desirous of bespeaking you—will you come—aye or no?"

Sheridan, who was shocked by the solemnity of the request, gave the desired promise, and the two returned to the table. Then, as if by magic, Gainsborough's gloom disappeared, his brilliancy returned more strikingly sparkling than ever; his wit and humour flowed forth faster and faster; and the remainder of the evening was spent in unchequered merriment and enjoyment. His gloomy forebodings of course resulted from the effect of an over-worked body on a highly sensitive brain, but they were very soon realized.

In 1788 the trial of Warren Hastings commenced, and to it flocked all the beauty, wit, learning, and fashion of the kingdom. Infected with the prevalent fever, Gainsborough joined the crowd which thronged Westminster Hall. Sitting thus, with his back to an open window, he suddenly felt an icy cold touch, as he described it, at the back of his neck. Mentioning this to his wife when he got home, she looked, and found a mark about the size of a shilling, harder to the touch than the surrounding skin, and this he said still felt cold. A doctor who was sent for declared that it was nothing more than a swelling of the glands which the warm weather would dissipate. Removing to Richmond for change of air, Gainsborough's symptoms became worse, so he returned to Schomberg House. The doctors now declared the protuberance to be a cancer, on which Gainsborough said, "If this be a cancer, I am a dead man;" and with the utmost composure he began to settle his earthly affairs, and to put his

house in order. In July he became rapidly worse, and he knew that his end was very near. If any regret tinged the gentle painter's contemplation of the approaching change, it was only on account of his Art—he had hoped to do so much more for her —he had meant in future works to remedy defects, supply deficiencies, and achieve greater things than he had yet accomplished ; he had meant to make his Art perfect. But as this was not to be, as the inexorable decree had gone forth, he waited with resignation the coming of that sleep which follows life's fitful fever, and as this approached he remembered there was one towards whom his feelings had not always been of the kindliest. He would not die then doubting the fact that he was at peace with all men ; so Reynolds was sent for and came and stood by his brother-painter's death-bed, and bending over the dying man caught those last faintly-whispered words—"We are all going to heaven, and Van Dyck is of the party."

According to his own desire he was buried in Kew churchyard, near the grave of his friend Joshua Kirby. The President of the Royal Academy was one of the pall-bearers. A large concourse of England's most honoured and most gifted sons paid their last sad tribute to the departed genius, and reverently followed his body to the grave ; and amongst the throng there was one who remembered sorrowfully how but eighteen months before he had solemnly promised the musician-painter that one true friend should follow him to the grave.

Gainsborough was a tall, fair man, handsome and well proportioned. His features were regular, a forehead broad and strongly marked, a Roman nose, and eyes and mouth indicating humour and refinement. His personal bearing was as elegant as his moral nature was attractive, and his skill as a painter was only excelled by his kindness as a man.

After his rupture with the Academy in 1784 he revisited Sudbury, where he created quite a sensation in his rich suit of drab, with laced ruffles and cocked hat. His wants were easily satisfied, and his "thousand pounds a year expense" amply sup-

plied everything he desired. He was too natural and too true to imagine pleasure in ostentation and display—hence some have brought against him the charge of parsimony, but nothing could be wider of the truth. Gainsborough was, as a matter of fact, generous to a fault, and gave away the productions of his studio as freely as he dispensed the hospitalities of his table. He presented Colonel Hamilton with his *Boy at the Stile*, a picture which he had long desired, in return for a solo on the violin; his friends were almost free to choose for themselves presents from his sketches, and one lady had so many that she papered the walls of her dressing-room with them. He had a ready sense of humour. When Fischer was on one occasion thrown, whilst riding to Salisbury, his mare taking flight at a heavily-laden waggon, Gainsborough to whom he had mentioned the incident sent him a rough sketch, which exhibited considerable power in caricature. Fischer is represented lying prostrate, whilst the waggoner grins at the disaster, and the mare shows a clean pair of heels in the distance. Beneath the picture was written the following doggrel—

> "A runaway horse you here may see,
> A warning sent, my friend, to thee;
> Better it is to shun the wheel,
> Than ride a blood to look genteel."

This was a hit at poor Fischer, who was a man of rather a vain disposition and fond of making a display.

Gainsborough was not willing to put up with anything like insolence or patronage. On one occasion when commissions were flowing into Schomberg House more rapidly than even his facile brush could execute them, and he was compelled to disappoint many impatient sitters, one gentleman completely lost his temper, and the painter overheard him asking the porter, "Has that fellow Gainsborough finished my portrait?" Being shown into the studio he beheld his picture, and was delighted with the artist's work. As profuse now in his approbation as he had been

discourteous in his impatience, he smilingly remarked, "I may as well give you a cheque for the other fifty guineas."

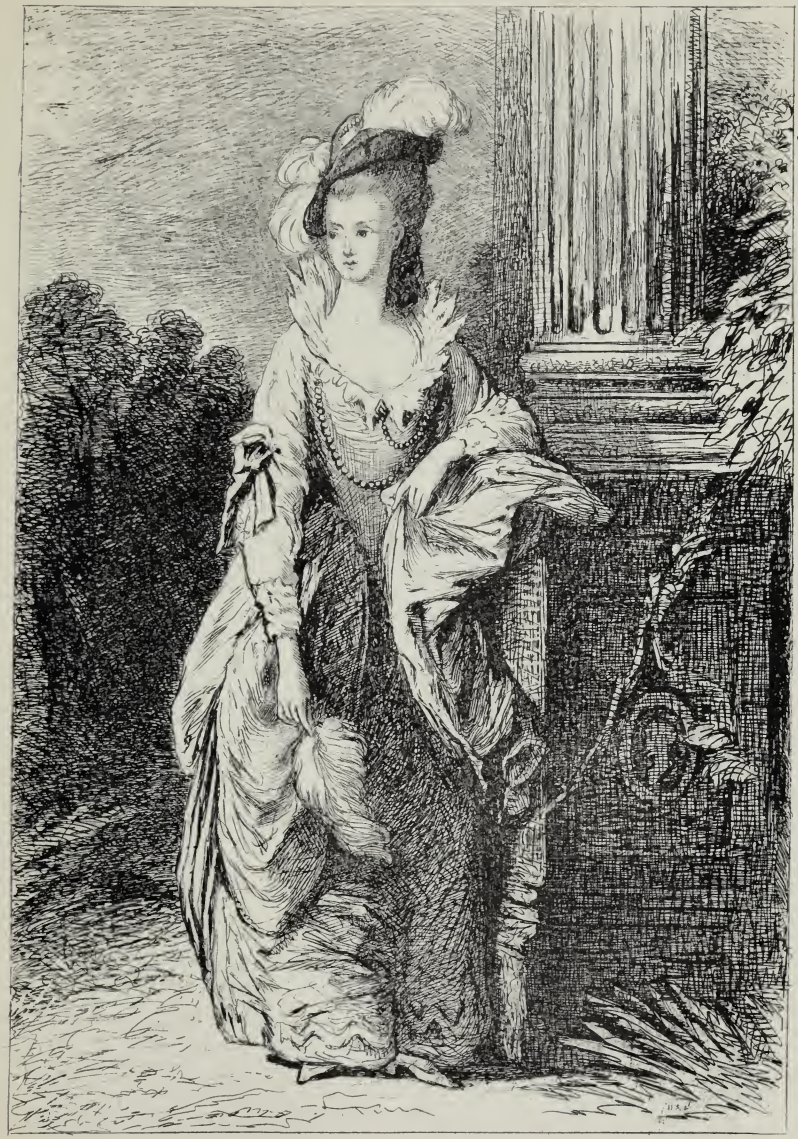
"Stay a minute," said the offended painter, "it just wants the finishing stroke;" and snatching up a background brush, he ruthlessly dashed it across the smiling features, indignantly exclaiming, "Sir, where is my fellow now?"

Amongst Gainsborough's sitters there came a gentleman whom Thicknesse calls an alderman, and Allan Cunningham a lord, but whose importance, whether derived from a corporation or a peerage, was very apparent in his erect mien, his richly laced coat, and well powdered wig. Placing himself in an advantageous situation as to light, he began to arrange his dress and dictate his attitude in a manner so ludicrously elaborate, that Gainsborough muttered—"This will never do." His Excellency having at length satisfactorily adjusted his person exclaimed, "Now, sir, I desire you not to overlook the dimple in my chin."

"Confound the dimple in your chin," said Gainsborough; "I shall neither paint the one or the other." And he refused to proceed with the picture.[1]

He was extremely capricious at times, and in illustration of this *trait* of his character, Fulcher mentions how when Sir Joshua had sat to him for his portrait at Gainsborough's special request, but had suddenly discontinued the sittings, being obliged by ill health to quit London, the variable artist, although courteously informed by the President of his convalescence, merely sent a message that he was "glad to hear Sir Joshua had recovered," but never again touched the picture. Yet these two rival geniuses paid each other graceful compliments occasionally. Gainsborough once said of Reynolds that his pictures "in their most decayed state were better than those of any other artist when in their best." And on one occasion when at the Academy Exhibition, noticing the unusual number of pictures sent by the President, he remarked in his bluff way to Sir George Beaumont as he glanced with evident approbation, "D—n him, how various he is."

[1] Fulcher's 'Life of Gainsborough,' p. 62, 2nd ed.



THE HONOURABLE Mrs. GRAHAM.

By Gainsborough.

In the National Gallery, Edinburgh.

Reynolds once said to Northcote, when speaking of Gainsborough, "I cannot make out how he produces his effects," and after all rivalry had been trampled out by his rival's death, Sir Joshua paid an eloquent and generous tribute to his genius.

Gainsborough had infirmities of temper, but his anger was generally easily appeased. Fulcher tells us that "whenever he spoke crossly to his wife, a remarkably sweet-tempered woman, he would write a note of repentance, sign it with the name of his favourite dog "Fox," and address it to his Margaret's pet spaniel "Tristram." Fox would take the note in his mouth and duly deliver it to Tristram. Margaret would then answer—

"My own dear Fox,

"You are always loving and good, and I am a naughty little female ever to worry you as I often do, so we will kiss and say no more about it.

"Your own affectionate

"Tris."

Northcote says of him, "He was a natural gentleman, and with all his simplicity he had wit too." Allan Cunningham gives us a charming sketch of his ordinary daily life. "He generally rose early, commenced painting between nine and ten o'clock, wrought for four or five hours, and then gave up the rest of the day to visits, to music, and to domestic enjoyment. He loved to sit by the side of his wife during the evenings, and make sketches of whatever occurred to his fancy, all of which he threw below the table save such as were more than commonly happy, and these were preserved and either finished as sketches or expanded into paintings. In summer he had lodgings at Hampstead for the sake of the green fields and the luxury of the pure air; and in winter he was often seen refreshing his eyes with light at the window when fatigued with close employment." The same writer speaking of his love of music remarks, that "he seems to have been kept under a spell by all kinds of melodious sounds." On the occasion of his presenting Colonel Hamilton

with the *Boy at the Stile* we are told that Gainsborough stood spellbound by the exquisite strains, and that there were "tears of rapture on his cheeks." Dr. Wolcot once paid him a very high compliment. He was in an adjoining room, and hearing Gainsborough playing he exclaimed, "That must be Abel." Poor Hayman has been made accountable for a certain freedom, bordering sometimes on coarseness, which characterized Gainsborough's conversation, and often renders his letters somewhat unpleasing. He certainly did not beat about the bush when he wished to give advice. Writing to his friend Henderson the actor in 1773, he advises him to imitate Garrick, whom he describes as "the greatest creature living;" but he follows up this excellent counsel with these remarks: "Look upon him, Henderson, with your imitative eyes, for when he drops you'll have nothing but poor old Nature's book to look in. You'll be left to grope about alone, scratching your pate in the dark, or by a farthing candle. Now is your time, my lively fellow! And, do ye hear, don't eat so devilishly; you'll get too fat when you rest from playing." Writing to the same person he again attacks him on this last point. "If one may judge by your last spirited epistle you are in good keeping; no one eats with more grateful countenance, or swallows with more good nature than yourself. . . . . Now any one who sees you eat pig and plum-sauce immediately feels that pleasure which a plump morsel, smoothly gliding through a narrow, glib passage into the regions of bliss, and moistened with the dews of imagination, naturally creates. Some iron-faced dogs, you know, seem to chew dry ingratitude and swallow discontent. Let such be kept to under parts and never trusted to support a character. In all but eating stick to Garrick; in that let him stick to you, for I'll be curst if you are not his master." He concludes by saying that the intention of Nature "must not be crossed. If it is she will tip the wink to Madam Fortune, and you'll be kicked down-stairs."

Probably if poor Gainsborough could ever have anticipated the insertion of these letters in his biography he would have

paid more attention to style. He evidently did not write letters intended for the public. Such things as these are the little blemishes, the faults and eccentricities, which bring genius down to the ordinary human level. We owe a debt of gratitude to Gainsborough, and as Englishmen we should be proud of him. His genius was essentially of native production. He never went abroad to study, and there never was an artist who was freer from foreign influences in his art; and from first to last his highest ambition was to be a faithful painter of English scenery. His life resembled, in its calm serenity, one of the peaceful landscapes he loved so well to paint, and if a cloud occasionally darkened the scene, as for instance when the fussy patronage of Thicknesse was too predominant, or when fancy seemed to hint that the Hanging Committee of the Royal Academy slighted him, the shadow would speedily pass away, leaving the simple, soft-hearted, emotional painter-musician happy and content in large-minded devotion to his art.

CHAPTER II.

THE GENIUS OF THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH.

"Art with no common gifts her Gainsborough graced,
Two different pencils in his hand she placed;
'This shall command,' she said, 'with certain aim,
A perfect semblance of the human frame;
This, lightly sporting on the village green,
Paint the wild beauties of the rural scene.'"

A Pindaric Ode on Painting. London, 1768.

"IF ever this nation should produce a genius sufficient to acquire to us the honourable distinction of an English School, the name of Gainsborough will be transmitted to posterity, in this history of the art, among the very first of that rising name." This was the opinion expressed by the President of the Royal Academy within a few months of the death of his great brother-artist; and now, nearly a century later, the splendid genius which marked Gainsborough as a worthy compeer of Hogarth, Wilson, and Reynolds—a genius which not even Turner with his "golden dreams" and visions in tinted vapour could eclipse—is still pointed at with pride by those who believe in the existence of Native art. Incomplete as must be the result within our prescribed limits, it may not be altogether unprofitable to review some of the causes which led to Gainsborough's high



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THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE.

BY GAINSBOROUGH.

In the possession of Viscountess Clifden.

degree of excellence as an artist and stamped his productions as those of an undoubted master-painter. Whether we consider him as a portrait painter, a landscape painter, or a delineator of humble peasant life and scene, it is the powerful impression of nature exhibited in all his works that calls forth our admiration, and rivets our attention. The striking general truth in all his productions which convinces us, when we see a picture of his, that we are looking on a representation of something that *is*, could only have been fixed on his canvases by one in whom an intense love for his art was combined with an intense and all-absorbing love of nature. The story of his life shows that this was the case with him. Nothing but his best was good enough; when the Duchess of Devonshire, "then in the bloom of youth, at once the loveliest of the lovely and the gayest of the gay," sat to him for her portrait, his work did not satisfy him, so, saying only, "Her Grace is too hard for me," he drew his wet brush across a mouth, "which all who saw thought most exquisitely lovely." And yet, within the last few years, upwards of £10,000 was given for this painter's portrait of the same lovely woman. Nor was he less particular and painstaking in the other branches of his art; only there he was enabled to study longer and more minutely from the original objects. During his rambles he would carefully notice every aspect of nature, and point out to the companions of his walks every combination and effect that struck him as being in any way picturesque. Did he see a graceful bough, a tree-stump of more than ordinary beauty, or a fantastic stone, he would not only note their salient features in his mind, but would frequently carry home with him the objects which had excited his admiration; the tree cuttings he acquired in this way would, it is said, have made a goodly sized wood-stack; when animals were introduced into his pictures, it was no unusual thing to see the living models posed in his painting-room. Did he meet abroad a labourer of picturesque appearance, a peasant girl whose cheeks were beautified with the bloom of health, or a beggar child whose simplicity and

beauty interested him, he would straightway accost them and strive to induce them to attend at his studio that he might add to his store of reflected nature. Naturally, his great love for his art led him to an enthusiastic determination to attain excellence, and this determination he triumphantly carried through by the only means by which real excellence can ever be attained—by dint of unflagging perseverance, much hard work, and never-ceasing endeavours to improve upon his latest productions. From the time when, as a student at the St. Martin's Lane Academy, finding there was nothing to be learnt from the works of his contemporaries, he set resolutely to work to find out how the great Flemish masters produced their wealth of colour, mastering their secrets one by one until at last he could make copies of Rubens, and Teniers, and Van Dyck, which "it would be no disgrace for the most accurate connoisseur to mistake at first sight for the work of these masters," until his death, he kept untiringly pressing forward towards that goal which we know no mortal can in any walk of life quite reach—perfection. On his death-bed "his regret at losing life was principally the regret of losing his art; and more especially as he now began, he said, to see what his deficiencies were, which he thought in his last works were in some measure supplied." [1]

The study of the Flemish masters, by which Gainsborough undoubtedly learnt much that was valuable and true in the language of his art—harmony of colouring, the management and disposition of light and shadow, and other means which its masters practise to ornament and give chiaroscuro to their works—was not unattended with some danger, and in the case of a less true or a less enthusiastic artist than Gainsborough, might have been the means of destroying that originality which is a component part of genius. In his early landscapes he did indeed show traces of the influence of the Flemish School; but, by great study, he soon discarded everything of mannerism that he had acquired; and what he had learned that was the common property

[1] Sir J. Reynolds, 14th Discourse.

of any painter, he applied to the originals of nature which he saw with his own eyes; and imitated these, not in the manner of bygone masters, but in his own. It is true that "there may be traced a lingering likeness in his landscapes to those of Rubens; but this arose more from his generalization of details, his sinking the parts in the whole, than to any imitation of the great Fleming. It is like the recollection of some sweet melody which the musician weaves into his theme, all unconscious that it is a memory and not a child of his own creation." [1]

Much difference of opinion exists as to the advantages to be derived from copying works of acknowledged masters as a part of art education. As the art of painting does not depend for its excellence upon the mere skill shown in the mechanical laying on of colour over a mathematically accurate outline—as a picture should have a soul—and as a painter should be a poet, it seems to us that the mechanism of copying, in the art of painting, is analogous to the art of translating in literature. One man can produce a translation of the 'Iliad,' a grammatically accurate but lifeless one, and therefore valueless except as a translation; another, through a score lines will breathe the soul and reveal the inspiration of Homer; this is better, and his few lines are worth all the pages of the lifeless translation. But half a dozen lines of the original 'Iliad' are worth more than all the other two put together. But still we would not say that either translator had wasted time or power in his work; for even the wooden one (if we may call him so) must in his task have acquired facility in the use of language—the tools of his art—and may in consequence become a better writer of English than if he had never looked for an idea or a thought beyond a Blue Book or a Parliamentary Report, whilst anyone possessed of the smallest spark of genius could not make the acquaintance of the greatest poet's masterpiece without having that spark kindled by the fire of genius therein. And so with painters; by close study and analysis of the masterpieces of the great ones of their art,

[1] Redgrave's 'Century of Painters.'

they learn to discover wherein genius truly lies, and to distinguish between it and mannerism, conventionalism, affectation, and falsehood. Reynolds could not discover genius in Michael Angelo or Rafaelle until he had long and carefully studied their works, and Gainsborough profited by judicious copying of the methods of the Flemings. As it is undenied that great poets may without degrading their art translate the verses of their brethren who have sung in other tongues, so it is no disgrace that our greatest colour-poets have reproduced the works of their brethren of the brush. In both cases the exercise is most excellent practice, and especially in the case of beginners in the arts. In both cases the excellence of the performance lies in the retention of the spirit breathed into the original by its creator;—and in neither case is the reproduction of equal worth with the original.[1]

[1] "It is a question worth considering, how far the arts have been advanced by the greatly increased facilities afforded during the last half-century for studying and copying the works of others—not only of the old masters, but also of contemporary painters, extending to many of the permanent and even some of the annual exhibitions. We cannot, at the present day, realize the position of a youth entering upon the pursuit of art wholly deprived of the means of studying past or contemporary works, and thus obliged to commence from the beginning, and achieve for himself every new step in the road to excellence. But of course all limitation in the means of access to other pictures, and of obtaining art information, must have a tendency to place him in this isolated position. Yet for healthy stimulus to action and for showing by what has been done what may be done, for shortening the path in matters which are only means to the end sought and not the end itself; for preventing conceit by the sight of excellence, and even by showing what to avoid, the opportunities afforded for seeing past and contemporary art must be highly valuable.

"On the contrary, it may be said that studying the works of others induces dependence, and tends to destroy individuality, originality, freshness of feeling, and even of execution. Moreover, while art properly studied enables the student to arrive readily at the rules and principles which have guided his predecessors in their treatment of subjects, in composition, arrangement of form, of colour, of light and dark, &c., it tends no doubt to fix him in dependence on like rules and to render his art somewhat conventional. However this may be, the balance of advantage is very largely in favour of such study; it will help an original mind rapidly to reach the

Perhaps Gainsborough's highest gift was that of colour, and there can be little doubt that this was intensified and made well nigh perfect by his early study of the Flemish works. In this respect he is entitled to rank with Rubens himself, and as Mr. Ruskin says, "in management and quality of single and particular tint, in the purely technical part of painting, Turner is a child to Gainsborough." The same critic then gives splendid testimony to Gainsborough's hand, "light as the sweep of a cloud, as swift as the flash of a sunbeam;" to his masses "broad as the first division in heaven of light from darkness," to his grand, simple, and ideal forms; to the fact that he never loses sight of his pictures as a whole, and to his immortality as a painter.

Much as study of the practice of other masters may have had to do with the development of Gainsborough's power of colour, it is probable that his habit of painting after daylight disclosed many secrets to him in this respect. Reynolds, speaking of this custom, after pointing out that it was an additional proof of Gainsborough's great love for his art, since he could find no such agreeable means of amusing himself in the evening, says: "By candlelight, not only objects appear more beautiful, but from their being in a greater breadth of light and shadow, as well as having a greater breadth and uniformity of colour, nature appears in a higher style; and even the flesh seems to take a richer and higher colour;"[1] and in support of his statement he gives it as his opinion that the two great colourists, Titian and Correggio,

point at which to rest on its own resources, and where only average talent is possessed will smooth the way past many difficulties. These remarks, however, do not refer to the now general practice of copying, which degrades art to a trade, and is the resort of mere mediocrity and feebleness. Copying pictures will never be resorted to by the true artist, except as a means to acquire execution or handling, or to arrive at the technical process by which any peculiar quality of art that has pleased him may be achieved."*

[1] Reynolds, 14th Discourse.

* "A Century of Painters," pp. 157-8, vol. i.

formed their high ideas of colouring from the effect of objects seen in an artificial light. One of the means Gainsborough employed in order to obtain the effect of the red shadows of Rubens was a lamp, the sides painted with vermilion, so that when it was used to illuminate the objects, he could paint the shadows as he *saw* them, and make them like what Jackson calls "the splendid impositions of Rubens." In illustration of a class of artificial light subjects not generally associated with Gainsborough's style, we give the following extract from the 'Somerset House Gazette' of April 10th, 1824. "Exhibition of drawings, Soho Square. . . *The Cottage* (Gainsborough) representing a most powerful effect of *firelight* in the interior. The artist has given considerable interest to this subject by introducing the cottager opening the door: the contrast between the light of the cottage and that of the moon excites the most pleasing association in the mind." Another (outdoor) *Moonlight Scene* was on view at the same exhibition; a few sheep scattered in the foreground, and a rippling stream in which the moon, just risen above some hills in the background, is brilliantly reflected.

Whilst speaking of Gainsborough's magic power of colour, it will be convenient to refer to the examples he has left, which show with what impunity a great master may break through a rule set up by another master whose reputation is as great, and who ranks higher as an authority in questions of practice. Reynolds, who found it difficult to determine whether Gainsborough most excelled in portraits, landscapes, or fancy pictures, had laid down the dogma that the cool colours (blue, grey, or green), should not enter into the masses of light in a picture, which should be composed of warm mellow colours (yellow, red, or a yellowish white). In one of Gainsborough's best known pictures, *The Blue Boy* (a portrait of Master Buttall), the figure is clad in a dress of cerulean blue. Concerning this picture and Sir Joshua's dictum, that eminent critic Dr. Waagen has thus written: "In spite of the blue dress, Gainsborough has succeeded in producing a harmonious and pleasing effect; nor can it be doubted that in

the cool scale of colours, in which blue acts the chief part, there are very tender and pleasing harmonies which Sir Joshua, with his way of seeing, could not well appreciate. On the whole, too, he may be so far right, that painters would do well to avoid as much as possible the use of pure unbroken blue in large masses. The *Blue Boy* is tender, remarkable for animation and spirit, and careful solid painting." Of other portraits by this master, in which a similar treatment has been adopted, we may mention the portrait of *Mr. and Mrs. Hallett* and that of *Mrs. Siddons.* As a matter of fact, Gainsborough could do anything he liked with colour; but a similar affection for the cool tints may be observed in some of the portraits of Van Dyck.

It is impossible to think of Gainsborough as a landscape painter without thinking of his unhappy and neglected contemporary, whose genius is now the triumphant boast of English art. Richard Wilson, never excelled and rarely equalled in his power of uniting originality of conception and treatment with truth and grandeur of expression, was a true poet, and equally so was Gainsborough. But the poetry of these two men was vastly different. Wilson's genius was nurtured amidst the rich and glowing scenery round Rome. The love of nature and the beautiful that Rome begets is strong but reverent; not a familiar love, but one somewhat tinctured with awe; tender, but very solemn.

"In Rome, Art and Nature strain together in perpetual conflict for supremacy; a struggle of a Titan with a God that holds on-lookers breathless. . . . Who with any power of vision or soul of artist in them can live a day blind to the vast and sublime beauties of the capital of the world?—who can fail to grow at once the humbler and the greater by dwelling on that sacred soil?" [1]

That Wilson's art was permanently influenced by his residence in that country where the Campagna, studded with the ruins of temples and ancient buildings, calls up, in our contemplation of

[1] Preface to 'Pascarèl,' by *Ouida.*

the living beauty of the scene, recollections of by-gone glory and vanished splendour, is evident in the spirit of nearly all his landscape works; and in his *Lake Avernus* it is particularly evident. The poetry of his nature was that of 'The Bard,' and his restless and yearning soul sought for comfort in the contemplation of some

> "——rock whose haughty brow
> Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood." [1]

Or in listening

> "How each giant oak and desert cave,
> Sighs to the torrent's awful voice beneath." [2]

Gainsborough, on the other hand, who never quitted England, spent his infancy and matured his art education in a country teeming with homely rural associations; and amidst such unambitious scenery he found congenial food for his mind and subject for his pencil.

"His uplands are the abode of ruddy health and labour; the by-paths, the deep-intrenched roads, the team, and the clownish waggoner all lead us to the pleasing contemplation of rustic scenery and domesticate us with the objects he has so faithfully delineated." [3]

Such subjects are very different from Wilson's classical conceptions, but in them is embodied no less true poetry—such poetry as Burns sang, and such as is contained in the 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard.' Gainsborough knew and loved the "lowing herd," the "ivy-mantled tower;" he rested often "beneath the rugged elm and yew trees's shade," and he loved well to sketch some nodding beech that "wreathed its old fantastic forms" by a brook that ran babbling by.[4]

[1] Gray's 'Bard.' [2] *Ibid.*

[3] 'Quarterly Review,' Feb. 1809.

[4] A writer in 'Blackwood' (Oct. 1833), thus describes one of Gainsborough's landscapes:—"An evening sky with a far-off perspective—a river stealing through a valley skirted with wood—in the foreground are two oaks, with the lichens strongly marked on their trunks; these connect themselves with the second distance of wood, which retires in the course of the stream

Reynolds, on the whole just in his estimation of Gainsborough, made the following somewhat paradoxical statement: "If Gainsborough did not look at Nature with a poet's eye, it must be acknowledged that he saw her with the eye of a painter; and gave a faithful, *if not a poetical*, representation of what he had before him." Now it must be remembered that these words formed part of a Discourse to the Academy Students, throughout which the necessity that children in art should submit themselves to their elders for instruction and advice, and the advantage of conforming to recognized methods and studying the works of the old masters, is dwelt upon.

towards a village only indicated by a church spire; beyond that is a distant wood on rising ground, but still low in the picture, towards which the water is lost. The composition is extremely simple. There is the 'sere and yellow leaf,' the sombre brown partaking much of the red, and very solemn dull green, scarcely bearing that name, interspersed in trees and on the ground. The river among the trees is scarcely perceptible, so near the hue of all about them, but in the distance it is marked by a strong yet somewhat broken line of light. It is long ere you see some cattle very indistinctly indicated in repose in the meadows. The clouds are broken into parts, and all perspectively going off to their rest—grey, amid a faint yellowish evening light—and in perfect concord with them are rooks returning for the night. It is just before that time when—

"Fades the glimmering landscape on the sight."

You could easily imagine the poetic sounds, from the distant church, where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep." You might hear the curfew that "tolls the knell of parting day," and the cawing of the rooks in their homeward passage. Gainsborough had put in a figure—apparently a countryman, leaning over some broken hurdles that separate the bank of foreground from the wood behind, but has judiciously painted over it; you can just see it has been there, but that discovery is only made when the picture is well known. It is not seen nor thought of when you look at it. The whole melancholy of "parting day" is thus preserved. A figure would have been an intrusion. The spectator is the figure, the subject will bear no other. He feels at once that even the rooks will soon lie still in their nests—

"And leave the world to darkness and to me."

Reynolds argued that as Gainsborough's particular line of art (as regards his landscapes and fancy pictures) required that his studies should be directed to the living world principally, he did not, nor was it necessary that he should, pay a general attention to the works of the various masters. It would never do that the pupils at the Academy of which Sir Joshua was President should be too independent; and as Gainsborough's excellence in his own line of art could not be denied, Reynolds discovered that that line was not poetical. In another place the President, speaking of Gainsborough's fancy pictures, talks of "the mean and vulgar form of a woodcutter." Those who are acquainted with Gainsborough's figure pieces will surely agree with us that his woodcutters and ploughmen are not mean and vulgar; humble and homely would perhaps describe them accurately. Gainsborough might have found both woodcutters and royal personages, doubtless, to whom these adjectives would apply; but he did not select his models so badly as to introduce such into his pictures; wherever and whenever he met a face or form that struck his artist's eye as being elegant, or graceful, or picturesque, he endeavoured to secure it for his canvas. Some of his pictures are brimming over with humour. Take *The Race*, for example. The expression of the donkey's faces is exquisite. The foremost one, galloping along with head almost on the ground, is casting out of the corner of its eye a look of keen enjoyment of the fun; whilst its companion in the rear is smiling (literally), though evidently anxious about the lost ground to be made up. The riders, too, bareheaded and coatless, bestriding their bare-backed steeds which they urge on to redoubled effort, are only donkey boys; yet there is nothing unpleasing about them, but rather much picturesqueness. And what of the face of *The Woodman in the Storm*, painted as it is said from a small model which Gainsborough made of the man who stood for the picture? What of the *Shepherd Boy in the Shower*, of which Haylett thus speaks: "I remember being once driven by a shower of rain for shelter into a picture-dealer's shop in Oxford



RUSTIC CHILDREN.

By Gainsborough.

In the National Gallery.

Street, where there stood on the floor a copy of Gainsborough's *Shepherd Boy* with the thunder-storm coming on. What a truth and beauty was there! He stands with his hands clasped, looking up with a mixture of timidity and resignation, eyeing a magpie chattering over his head, while the wind is rustling in the branches. It was like a vision breathed on the canvas."

Some modern painters and those critics who follow them have a poor opinion of Gainsborough's art. They say that his drawing is faulty, and that his landscapes have not sufficient detail to rank as finished pictures. There is, of course, some reasons for their censure, and we do not attempt to deny that Gainsborough's style is sketchy. But if, as we believe, it is the aim of a landscape painter to bring before the spectator the representation of some scene as a whole, Gainsborough certainly succeeded better than any of the later painters who crowd into their canvases as many minutely painted details of natural features as they possibly can, and then label the collection a *Landscape*. If it were possible to paint every detail of a scene exactly and equally finished—every tree, shrub, blossom, petal, blade of grass, tiny stone, &c., there would not be much objection to so doing, provided always that the artist never lost sight of the fact that a mere agglomeration of details is valueless unless the general spirit of the scene bind them together. But when one or two features are, *to any marked extent*, detailed beyond the others, then the picture is no longer a landscape, but becomes in fact the portrait of a cow, or a plough, or a tree, or what not, relieved by a more or less pleasing background in landscape style. If one places before a casual observer a landscape photograph (that has not been touched up or toned down by an artist's hand) it is ten chances to one that the first observation will be, "How well that figure in the foreground, or that hut in the middle distance, or that oak, or that cluster of marsh-mallows comes out!" Then the eye wanders to other parts of the view, but ever returns after a brief survey to the one prominent spot that stands out with such fatal distinctness. From the very nature of the lens

by which the image was reproduced it was impossible that more than one point could have been in exact focus; all others must have been, in degree, less distinctly shadowed on the sensitive plate. Yet what painter would attempt to draw every detail of a landscape with equal fidelity and minuteness to that obtainable in a photograph? Gainsborough felt that the true charm of a landscape lay not in its details but in its spirit, and he attempted to make his pictures convey a similar general impression to the spectator to that which would be derived from a contemplation of the original scene.

To accomplish this, his practice was to paint the whole of his picture at once, not building it up by parts, but working at foreground, middle distances, background, trees, figures, sky, and every part indiscriminately; the result was invariably a harmonious whole. And that he might the more readily conjure up the whole scene in his mind's eye without delay or stopping in his work, he would arrange on his table a rough plan of his landscape, using broken stones, dried herbs, and pieces of looking-glass. He made little laymen for human figures, he modelled his horses and cows, and knobs of coal sat for rocks. The value of such a system will be readily understood by any one who has ever recalled every feature of some almost forgotten but once familiar scene by merely glancing at a bird's-eye view of the place. These *views* are not really representations of anything at all, but they are admirable aids to memory. Thus Gainsborough's principal aim in landscape—we are speaking of his best style, after he had eschewed the tenets of the Flemish and Dutch Schools—was to grasp the whole, knowing that if he did that well the part must be right. And to our mind he succeeded admirably. Mr. Ruskin thus praises and at the same time finds fault with the landscape presented by Gainsborough to the Royal Academy:[1] "Nothing can be more attractively luminous or aerial than the distance of the Gainsborough, nothing more bold or inventive than the forms of its crags, and

[1] 'Modern Painters,' vol. i. p. 91.

the diffusion of the broad distant light upon them, where a vulgar artist would have thrown them into dark contrast. But it will be found that the light of the distance is brought out by a violent exaggeration of the gloom in the valley; that the forms of the green trees which bear the chief light are careless and ineffective; that the markings of the crags are equally hasty; and that no object has realization enough to enable the eye to rest upon it."[1]

With regard to the first objection, if "nothing can be more attractively luminous or aerial than the distance," why take exception to the only means by which that effect could be produced? As there is no pigment known that can equal the light of heaven in purity or intensity of tint, and as it was the painter's endeavour to keep the same relation between the gloom and the light in the picture as was observable in nature; as, moreover, the light of nature is absolutely inimitable, it was necessary to deepen the gloom in order to keep the relation. The other objections may be summed up in the modern critic's cry—want of detail and insufficient realization. We have already mentioned that Gainsborough painted landscapes in the whole and not in part, but for all that he knew well enough that

[1] It should be mentioned that in the same section from which we have quoted, Mr. Ruskin has said of Gainsborough: "A great name his, whether of the English or any other school, the greatest colourist since Rubens, and the last, I think, of legitimate colourists; that is to say, of those who were fully acquainted with the use of their material; pure in his English feeling, profound in his seriousness, graceful in his gaiety, there are nevertheless certain deductions to be made from his worthiness which I dread to make because my knowledge of his landscape works is not extensive enough to justify me in speaking of them decisively; but this is to be noted of all that I know, that they are rather motives of feeling and colour than earnest studies; that their execution is in some degree mannered, and always hasty; that they are altogether wanting in affectionate detail; and that their colour is in some degree dependent on a bituminous brown and conventional green, which have more of science than of truth in them." He then proceeds to say that this fault may be noticed in the picture we have referred to.

the effect of the whole would be hopelessly marred, or even destroyed, by one false detail. We have mentioned how his painting-room was filled with bits of trees, stones, mosses, &c.; and he studied how to represent these faithfully and unobtrusively—for they could not be represented unobtrusively if not faithfully. His early works were remarkable for portrait-like adherence to local scenery and minute and detailed finish, and Fulcher mentions one of his numerous studies of trees—a young oak, "painted leaf for leaf, whilst ferns and grapes are portrayed with microscopic fidelity." In his portrait of Fischer, as we before mentioned, he gives us a fine example of the care he could bestow upon details if he chose, or thought it desirable to do so. Redgrave remarks upon his power of detail as displayed in this picture: "The fiddle in the chair is a notable example—a connoisseur in the instrument would at once name the builder; a Dutchman would spend three months of labour and produce nothing like its reality."

In his sea pieces, too, though he never pretended to minute correctness of rigging, his general effects of sea, sea-coast, and vessels are described as truly masterly. Gainsborough only painted about four sea pieces, although he generally introduced the sea and a ship by way of background to his portraits of sailors. Towards the close of his career he painted his best picture of this class, described in Carey's 'Catalogue of the Leicester Gallery' as *A Sea-shore with Boats and Figures.*[1] But perhaps the complaints of his want of detail and finish are made by those who examine a picture with the finger and nose, feeling and smelling it instead of regarding it with their eyes. How little Gainsborough himself cared for this class of criticism is evident from his letter to Mr. Edgar, whose portrait had been sent home and criticized:—

"You please me much by saying that no other fault is found in your picture than the roughness of the surface, for that part being of use in giving force to the effect at a proper distance,

[1] See Fulcher's 'Life of Gainsborough,' 2nd ed., p. 144.

and what a judge of painting knows an original from a copy by; I am much better pleased that they should spy out things of that kind than to see an eye half an inch out of its place, or a nose out of drawing when viewed at a proper distance. I don't think it would be more ridiculous for a person to put his nose close to the canvas and say the colours smell offensive than to say how rough the paint lies." Sir Godfrey Kneller used to tell them "that pictures were not made to smell of." Reynolds also speaks of "all those odd scratches and marks, which, on a close examination, are so observable in Gainsborough's pictures, and which even to experienced painters appear rather the effect of accident than design: this chaos, this uncouth and shapeless appearance, by a kind of magic at a certain distance assumes form, and all the parts seem to drop into their proper places, so that we can hardly refuse acknowledging the full effect of diligence under the appearance of chance and hasty negligence." Reading between the lines of Sir Joshua's 'Discourse' we fancy we see throughout the whole pamphlet: "This man undoubtedly produced splendid results, but his practice was not in strict conformity with our recognized academic rules, therefore something *ought* to be wrong." And some later critics say: "Gainsborough's practice was unorthodox—we will not, therefore, under any circumstances allow his productions to rank with those of the great masters."

Smith tells us that it was Gainsborough's practice in portrait painting to sometimes use brushes with handles six feet long, so that he, his easel, and his sitter forming the apices of an equilateral triangle, he could touch the features in his canvas from the same distance as that at which he viewed his sitter. This may account for some of the "odd scratches and marks" which appear on close examination, and for the "reedy" execution in the portraits of the Countess of Lincoln and the Countess of Ligonier; and for the "tree touch" on the eyebrow of Lord Chesterfield—all of which portraits viewed at a proper distance are perfect.

As a portrait painter Gainsborough may rank with Reynolds as of equal excellence though in a different direction. Many would, of course, contest this statement. Those who have the opportunity and the capacity of judging from the works of the two painters may easily satisfy themselves on this point. Those who prefer to take up their position beneath the shelter of professional art critics we refer to one of the earliest disbelievers in Gainsborough as a portrait painter, who, in the 'Quarterly Review' for February, 1809, states that Reynolds formally denied Gainsborough's power of giving a just resemblance. Sir Joshua's own words on this point are :

"It is difficult to determine whether his portraits were most admirable for exact truth of resemblance, or his landscapes for portrait-like representation of Nature."

Mr. Tom Taylor says with great truth that in the gradation of light, shade, and colour, Gainsborough is superior to Reynolds That he was also superior to him in the technical use of materials time has proved, for his pigments have certainly lasted better than Sir Joshua's.

One very noticeable feature in Gainsborough's portraits is the brilliant freshness of his flesh tints which, even now, "stand out like enamel." Gainsborough always made a careful and intelligent study of his subjects, and knew instinctively when a careful reproduction of the features and when a conscientious introduction of all the details of a sumptuous toilette would be most esteemed. The *Duchess of Beaufort* is an example of Gainsborough's skill in painting decorative drapery. But if he sometimes stooped towards the level of the Japanese artist, who cares nothing usually for the countenance of the sitter and everything for his attire, still he kept the best efforts of his genius for subjects of intellectual pre-eminence. As illustrations we may instance the portraits of *William Pitt*, "calm, passionless, statesmanlike;" *Mrs. Siddons at the age of twenty-five*, "in the prime of her glorious beauty;" *Garrick*, the man "worth studying in every action," the peerless actor, the "gracious and sincere friend;"

Abel, the musician; Dr. Schomberg; and above all *Benjamin Franklin.* As we have said, Mrs. Garrick pronounced Gainsborough's to be the best portrait of "her Davy," and he has certainly produced a more pleasing and gentlemanly figure than Sir Joshua, who painted a front view of the same actor. Apart from the playful vagaries by which Foote and Garrick provoked from the painter the expression of comic despair, "Rot them for a couple of rogues, they have everybody's faces but their own," Garrick's face seems to have been a difficult subject to treat. Abel, the musician, is very carefully painted, and the picture was a favourite one of the artist's. The left hand is especially noticeable for its careful execution. The musician is represented in the act of performing, and his face suggests rapt attention to the sounds he is producing. The portrait of Dr. Schomberg is considered one of the finest in the world, and the landscape background is worthy of the painter. Never was Gainsborough more successful than in portraying Franklin, "the good, great man of noble bearing."

The figures of Gainsborough are deliciously natural and simple, and in this respect as well as in the permanent brilliancy of colour they contrast favourably with Sir Joshua's paintings. "The children of Sir Joshua are indeed beautiful creations," says Allan Cunningham; "free, artless, and lovely; but they seem all to have been nursed in velvet laps and fed with golden spoons. There is a rustic grace, an untamed wildness about the children of the other (Gainsborough) which speaks of the country and of neglected toilets. They are the offspring of Nature, running free amongst woods as wild as themselves. They are not afraid of disordering their satins and wetting their kid shoes. They roll on the green sward, burrow like rabbits, and dabble in the running streams daily."

Gainsborough has painted many beautiful women, and his female portraits are all characterized by purity of expression. He paints women alike able to inspire admiration and worthy of retaining pure and reverential love. What can surpass the

grace and artistic treatment exhibited in such portraits as *The Duchess of Cumberland;* the *Countess of Lincoln;* and *Lady Ligonier?* The delicacy of conception and harmony of execution are beyond all praise. The pure delicate features are delineated with exquisite tenderness, the "lovingly liquid" eyes look out from the canvas as though from a living person; there is a marvellous purity of colour in the cheeks; a sweet womanly grace in the pose of the figure; a careless grace in the drapery, which stamp these delicious paintings as the loving productions of a master's hand. And where shall we find a more attractive portrait than that of the *Honourable Mrs. Graham*, wife of General Graham? Never was Gainsborough's marvellous power in controlling and contrasting colour more strikingly displayed than in this picture. The clear cool tones of the dress are contrasted with the warm crimson colouring of the lower part of the figure with wondrous skill. The grace of the full-length figure is perfect; the features are delicate and highly characteristic, in what Dr Waagen happily calls their "expression of youthful disdain." The modelling of the face and the careful painting of the beautiful hands is marvellously accurate. The beautiful original of this picture was cut off by a premature death, and thus a sad interest attaches to a work which upon its artistic merits may rank as one of Gainsborough's masterpieces.

There is a graceful fitness in the fact that the artist never exercised his genius more lovingly or successfully than in the portrait of his sweet, faithful Margaret. Mrs. Gainsborough's charms glow as freshly on the canvas to-day as on that happy morn when the painter led his youthful bride to the altar. As Allan Cunningham says very prettily, these paintings "are like himself, they glow with animation, and there is a magic touch which none can describe." His works show that he was capable of minute execution and the most delicate handling, but these he looked upon only as the means whereby an end might be attained. He never mistook them for the end itself. In some cases, however, he undoubtedly did not pay sufficient attention

to detail, relying too much on the colouring and motive, and not making his pictures sufficiently finished studies to permit of our classing them as perfect. The impatience of his nature, and the rapidity with which he worked, has in many cases resulted in imperfect execution. "We do not know," says Fulcher, "that, like Reynolds on quitting the studio of Hudson, Gainsborough ever painted a sitter with one hat on his head and another under his arm—but mistakes no less ludicrous appear in some of his landscapes. In one picture an owl is perched on a tree in broad daylight; in another cattle are introduced lying so close to the sea that the next wave must certainly cover them." In the *Shepherd Boy in the Shower*, the boy is placed on the wrong side of the hedge, so that the rain is blowing full upon him.

The same fault is visible in many of his best portraits. But Sir Joshua has pointed out that the slightness which we see in so many of his best works, is not so much a fault of negligent execution as a manner of the artist's. Such a genius as Gainsborough's might be permitted to deal sportively with some details; but occasionally he carries this airy indifference to too great a length. His numerous drawings were for the most part masterly, and equal in point of character to his most finished productions. His friend Jackson says that he has seen fully a thousand of these, and that "they have all great length and singular freedom of handling." Many of these were copied and published by the painter's nephew, Richard Lane, to whom Allan Cunningham paid the high compliment of saying that "most of the artist's spirit survived in him."

Our National Collection contains a few fine specimens of Gainsborough's Art. Those numbered from 308 to 311, are—308. *Musidora bathing her Feet;* 309. *The Watering Place;* 310. *Woody Landscape, Sunset;* 311. *Rustic Children.*

The Watering Place is one of those pictures in which Gainsborough specially delighted and which most of all are indicative of his character. It is one of his strong delineations of simple

rustic life. In the foreground is a placid pool of water with three cows drinking, the cowherd in slouched hat of the genuine Suffolk labourer's type, standing lazily on the brink. The green banks are shaded by noble trees, and away in the distance rises a fine old Norman castle, which very closely resembles Hedingham Castle, a few miles from Sudbury, for which it was probably intended; but if so the hill behind it was borrowed for the occasion from Cumberland, as there is not one of the size within the boundaries of Essex and Suffolk. It is an enchanting picture, full of delicious quiet and repose. Gainsborough disposed of his landscapes very slowly, and after his death his widow held an exhibition of his works at Pall Mall, consisting of fifty-six paintings and one hundred and forty-eight engravings. The object was to sell the pictures, and many of them were sold at the time. The *Blue Boy*, and *The Cottage Door*, after some vicissitudes, found a permanent home in the Grosvenor Collection.

The latter picture is greatly admired, and is thus described by Cunningham: "It represents a cottage matron with an infant in her arms and several older children around her enjoying themselves at the door of a little rustic cabin. This lodge in the wilderness is deeply shut up in a close wooded nook; through the shafts of the trees glimpses of knolls and streams are obtained There is uncommon breadth and mass about it, with a richness of colouring, a sort of brown and glossy goldenness, which is common in the works of the artist. The matron herself is the perfect beau-ideal of a youthful cottage dame—rustic loveliness exalted by natural gentility of expression."

Upwards of three hundred paintings, besides over a thousand drawings, make up the record of Gainsborough's life-work. Of his paintings, over two hundred and twenty are portraits. George III. was painted by him no less than eight times; Pitt was painted seven times; Garrick five. Amongst his portraits of lawyers are those of Lord Chancellor Camden and Sir William Blackstone; Johnson, Laurence Sterne, Richardson, Clive, Burke,



See page 74.

THE COTTAGE DOOR. BY THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH.

In the possession of the Duke of Westminster.

Sheridan, Windham, Franklin, and Canning;—Mrs. Graham, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Lady Vernon, and Lady Maynard;—the Bishops of Worcester and Ferns;—Quin and Mrs. Siddons, are a few of the names which are associated with Gainsborough's art as a portrait painter. And though his skill in this department was so great that, had he no other merit, it would have entitled him to a foremost place in British Art, it is as a painter of the country that we love to think of him—for every time we see one of his landscapes we realize how soothing, tender, and affecting is the artist's skill. "The stillness of noon, the depths of twilight, and the dews and pearls of the morning," says Constable, "are all to be found on the canvases of this most benevolent and kindhearted man. On looking at them we find tears in our eyes and know not what brings them. The lonely haunts of the solitary shepherd—the return of the rustic with his bill and bundle of wood—the darksome lane or dell—the sweet little cottage-girl at the spring with her pitcher—were the things he delighted to paint, and which he painted with exquisite refinement, yet not a refinement beyond nature."

"Gainsborough is an immortal painter" is the conclusion of one not lavish of his praise. This high eulogium must not blind us to his shortcomings. His vegetation, his rocks, his water, all the properties,—the hooks as it were on which he hangs out Nature—should have to the lover and knower of Nature more characteristic forms than Gainsborough gives them. His imitation of the forms of Nature is not sufficiently finished. But the golden wealth of sunlight, the freshness of the sweeping wind, the vastness of the infinite ether—these are properties which no technical details or mechanical skill will suffice to conjure up on the artist's canvas—these are beauties which cannot be described, can only be seen or felt. These are seen and felt in Gainsborough's pictures, and in the calm contentment which attends the contemplation of such rare beauty, censorious criticisms were fitly hushed.

CHRONOLOGY.

GAINSBOROUGH.

1727 Birth. May ?

1741 Goes to Study in London.

1745 Marriage and Settlement at Ipswich.

1754 Meets Thicknesse.

1760 Removes to Bath.

1768 Becomes a Royal Academician.

1774 Settles in London at Schomberg House.

1784 Rupture with the Royal Academy.

1788 Death. August 2.



PORTRAIT OF JOHN CONSTABLE, R.A.

JOHN CONSTABLE, R.A.



A LOCK ON THE STOUR. BY CONSTABLE.

JOHN CONSTABLE.

CHAPTER I.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

THE life of a painter is one of almost constant toil, but whilst all who determine to devote their lives to Art will find that the ascent to anything worthy of the name of excellence is toilsome and difficult, there is a fulness of satisfaction to be derived from the attempt which is not dependent upon success in the ordinary sense of the term. Disappointments and successes, indeed, are not blended equally in a painter's life according to an inexorable law of cause and effect. At any rate they were not so blended in the case of John Constable, who to the end of his days was an unappreciated painter, spite of the tardy honours which the Royal Academy were at length wise enough to bestow. Still, in his simple devotion to his art, and in the consciousness of power, he was content to struggle on to the end, so that he almost died with his brush in his hand. He had set himself a difficult task. By constant and intelligent study of nature, and patient acquisition of the technical details of his art, he sought to attain excellence, and one by one the obstacles in his path were

broken down, and the day came, at last, when he knew that he might claim a place on the eminence where stand those bright spirits who in a like heroic struggle have won the same deathless fame. But he had set himself a still more difficult task than that. He would conquer British apathy, and purify bad taste in matters relating to Art, and in this effort he could scarcely expect entirely to succeed. Yet he did not turn in querulous disdain from those who refused the meed of praise so fairly earned. "He yearned for the appreciation he so truly merited." When his house was full of pictures which he could not sell he used every means of bringing his art before his countrymen, and even advertised that his collection might be seen *gratis* daily on application at his residence. The British public availed itself very sparingly of the privilege, and suffered the due recognition of this truly great and pure painter of our national scenery to come from France and posterity.

John Constable was born at East Bergholt, in Suffolk, June 11, 1776, two years after Gainsborough settled in his comfortable quarters in Pall Mall. East Bergholt is a pretty village happily situated on an eminence overlooking the valley of the Stour, which on the south is the boundary between Suffolk and Essex. It is about fourteen miles distant from Sudbury, the birthplace of our other landscape painter and Suffolk worthy, Thomas Gainsborough.

The 'Suffolk Traveller' thus describes the place: "This is a large village consolidated to Brantham. The cloth manufacture formerly flourished here. It is supposed to have been a market-town: but the market is disused and the town is greatly reduced, many houses having lately been pulled down."

In a work entitled 'The Beauties of England and Wales" (London, 1801), we find this prosaic description: "The church is a good structure . . . and many parts of it are of very elegant workmanship. Southward of the church is a neat mansion built by Thomas Chaplin, Esq. . . . . The residences of the rector, the Rev. Dr. Rhudde, Peter Godfrey, Esq., Mrs. Roberts, and Golding

Constable, Esq. give this place an appearance far superior to that of most villages."

The Golding Constable here referred to was a wealthy miller, grandson of a Yorkshire farmer, who years before had come south and settled at Bures, a village on the Essex border, some eight or nine miles west of East Bergholt. He prospered well, and his grandson Golding, beside inheriting the Flatford water-mill and considerable wealth, purchased two wind-mills in the neighbourhood of Bergholt, and another water-mill at Dedham, a very pretty village on the Essex side of the river, and also one at Flatworth. He built the house honoured with mention in 'The Beauties of England and Wales,' and married a wealthy and amiable young lady, Miss Ann Watts. At the time of our painter's appearance on the scene of action they had only one other child, whom biographers of the artist have not thought fit to immortalize. The world at large did not trouble itself about the event which had disturbed the serenity of the worthy miller's household on that 11th June, any more than it did with any other of the thousands of similar daily occurrences, but to Golding Constable and his family it was fraught with the deepest interest. For the new life that day launched on the tide of existence was very nearly lost. Very frail was the tiny human craft that came to gladden the hearts of the worthy couple, and was destined to confer such benefits on mankind, and the anxious parents were prepared in sadness to part with the son they had scarce yet set eyes upon. But happily the fears for his welfare were ill-founded, and baby Constable conquered in the struggle for existence, and grew up to be the strong, healthy, handsome young miller of Bergholt, and, what most concerns us, to add another immortal name to the roll of English landscape painters whose productions have exalted our country to the foremost rank of modern art.

Rembrandt, Etty, and Constable were the sons of millers, but we do not press the resemblance closer, for unlike Rembrandt, Constable was distinguished by the care and finish of his

productions, and Etty, although he at first thought to paint landscape, "inclined to heroic subjects, and then to devote himself, as he said, to God's most glorious work, woman." Moreover, it is not recorded of Mrs. Constable as of Mrs. Etty, that she supplemented her husband's efforts as a miller by embarking in the gingerbread trade. We may assume that the artist's boyhood did not differ very much from that of ordinary country lads in his station of life. At the age of seven he was placed at a boarding-school some fifteen miles from his home, and from thence he was removed to a school at Lavenham, celebrated beyond the county for its church and peal of ten bells. Here he spent some time unprofitably and unhappily. The master was at that date in the habit of absenting himself from his school on certain love-making expeditions, and the usher used the boys pretty much as he liked, his liking taking the form of flogging them unmercifully all round. Young Constable for some time cherished most warlike and vindictive feelings towards this flogging usher, but as there is no record of any subsequent hostile encounter between them, it is probable that the artist's love of peace and order induced him to abandon his resentment. After leaving the Lavenham school John was sent to the Grammar School at Dedham, built by dame Elizabeth Clarke, and endowed in 1571 by William Littlebury. He did not display any fondness for scholarship, and although we are told that he learnt some Latin, the only branch of education in which he showed any marked proficiency was penmanship, and this is also recorded as the only noticeable excellence which Gainsborough attained to in his school days. As a boy he was fond of drawing and painting, but this is by no means an unusual amusement with youths who in after life never so much as execute a pencil sketch. He was also fond of reading poetry and enthusiastic about music, and could play a little on several instruments. At this period of his life he would often become very abstracted during his school work, and the master would say to him, "Oh! I see, you are in your painting-room again." He was fortunate



ON THE STOUR. BY JOHN CONSTABLE.

in being under a master who had the perception to see that his pupil was a genius, and that the bent of his mind lay outside the sphere of grammar school education.

From his earliest days he manifested a native gift for appreciating the beautiful in nature. Under some circumstances he might have been known to us now as a poet; or he might have lived and died a simple, mute adorer of nature, a silent worshipper of God's universe, content with the knowledge of how very good it is to live, happy in being permitted to breathe amid the wealth of creation. But, as it happened, just outside the gates of his father's house lived one JOHN DUNTHORNE, plumber, glazier, and enthusiast, who also had the rare faculty of perceiving how beautiful is nature. Dunthorne's trade brought to him the knowledge that, within certain limits, it was possible to reproduce and fix some of the scenery which impressed him so deeply. With him, Constable, though many years younger, had formed an acquaintance, and the two became inseparable companions, spending all their leisure time in sketching and painting landscape from nature. From this humble tutor Constable received his first lessons in the practice of painting, generally in the open air, sometimes at Dunthorne's cottage, and occasionally at a little room that they hired in the village. Golding Constable offered no opposition to the companionship his son chose, but was, as might naturally be expected in those times, decidedly adverse to his becoming a professional painter. Such a profession was then considered somewhat questionable, a popular prejudice obtaining that the majority of artists led sad lives, and that their habits were as a rule too nearly resembling those of rollicking George Morland and company to be adopted by any respectable persons.

Had Constable been inclined to devote himself to the requisite course of study, his father would have educated him for Holy Orders. But, as has been observed, the young artist was not particularly fond of book-learning, so it came about that he was destined for the trade of a miller; and for about a year he worked

carefully and well in one of his father's mills—the one represented in an engraving called *Spring*, published in 1831, in a work entitled 'English Landscape,' which we shall notice more particularly further on. This engraving is from one of his own sketches, and the cloudscape is a prominent feature of it. The study and observation of every change of the sky is no unimportant part of a wind-miller's business, and these had their effect upon the future artist, and made an impression upon him which throughout his whole career led him to search unceasingly after those wondrous sky effects which are apparent in nearly all his productions.

At Dedham, close to East Bergholt but on the opposite side of the Stour, and, like that and many of the villages in that part of the country, a decayed market town, formerly famous for its flourishing clothing trade carried on by Flemish weavers, from the time of Edward III., there lived at this date the dowager Lady Beaumont, from whom Mrs. Constable obtained for her son John an introduction to Sir George Beaumont. Sir George was the fashionable authority of the day on all matters relating to taste and the fine arts, and though we now laugh at his vapid utterances and conventional style of criticism—above all, at his inquiry, "Where do you put your brown tree?" in a landscape, and at his dictum that "A good picture should be the colour of a good fiddle, *brown*"—still his influence was then paramount. Moreover, with all his pretension and shallowness, he did a thorough and lasting service to art in so zealously promoting the establishment of our National Gallery. When young Constable showed Sir George some pen and ink copies he had made of certain of Raphael's cartoons, the aristocratic patron was graciously pleased to express his thorough satisfaction, showed him Claude's painting of the *Annunciation*[1] (with which, of course, Constable immediately and permanently fell in love) and lent him some thirty water-colour drawings by Tom Girtin, advising

[1] Now in the National Gallery.

him to study these as examples of breadth and truth. The influence of these water-colour drawings may be observed in Constable's treatment throughout his career. The most important result of Sir George's notice of the young artist, however, was that Golding Constable now consented to his son visiting London for the purpose of ascertaining what chance he had of succeeding in life as a painter.

There was at this time (1795) practising in London, a certain landscape painter, one JOSEPH FARRINGTON, R.A.; considered to be one of Wilson's best pupils. Of his works we now know nothing; he seems to have been possessed of no genius whatever, but to have been a man of good discernment, and gifted with a good store of sound common sense. To this one Constable bore a letter of introduction, and before long Farrington recognized and proclaimed that the young painter had real genius. He predicted that one day his landscapes would "form a distinct feature in art." Though Constable was never a regular pupil of Farrington's, it is probable that he picked up from him valuable crumbs of instruction. In London Constable also made the acquaintance of JOHN THOMAS SMITH, or (as he was usually called) "Antiquity" Smith, the engraver, afterwards author of 'Nollekens and his Times,' and from 1816 Keeper of the Prints in the British Museum. This friendship wedded him still more closely to art. But the paternal opposition to his adoption of painting as a profession was not yet overcome, for in October 1796 young Constable had returned to his home, whence he wrote to Smith that he was spending his evenings in reading art books and studying anatomy; and in January 1797 that he had been etching, and he makes some inquiries on practical points relating to that pursuit from Smith; and again in March 1797 he thus writes to his friend: "I must now attend to my father's business, as we are likely soon to lose an old servant (our clerk) who has been with us 18 years; and I now see plainly that it will be my lot to walk through life in a path contrary to that in which my inclination would lead me."

In October of the same year Mrs. Constable wrote to Smith expressing the great pleasure which she had derived in receiving from him a letter warm in its commendation of John, whom she was expecting to return to East Bergholt in a few days, when she hoped he would attend to business—milling—by doing which he would please his father and "ensure his own respectability and comfort;" from which it appears that even the indulgent mother had her doubts as to whether it were possible for a painter, as such, to be either "respectable" or "comfortable."

At the age of twenty John Constable was tall, well-formed, clean-featured, of a fresh complexion, had fine dark eyes, a face smooth save for slight whisker tufts, and his hair not abundant was slightly wavy; his expression was decidedly intellectual, and altogether he well deserved the sobriquet by which he was known, "the handsome young miller." We have no information as to the particular events which induced Constable *père* to sanction his son finally adopting the profession which he honoured and adorned; but it is quite certain that dutiful John would never have taken such a grave step in defiance of his parent's wishes. As a son, as a husband, and as a father, his conduct was ever irreproachable; the man's earnest, affectionate, noble, deeply sensitive and emotional nature is unostentatiously exhibited in nearly every one of his many letters of which the 'Memoirs'[1] of his life mainly consists. We may therefore suppose that time and observation convinced Golding Constable that his son was born to be an artist, and that it was useless attempting to combat what was preordained. At all events, on the 2nd April, 1799, John Constable wrote from London to his early friend and preceptor Dunthorne: "I am this morning admitted as student at the Royal Academy; the figure which I drew for admittance was the Torso. I am most comfortably settled in Cecil Street, Strand, No. 23."

[1] 'Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, Esq., R.A., composed chiefly of his Letters.' By C. R. Leslie, R.A. London, 1843.

He goes on to say he is about to copy a Ruysdael, several of whose pictures had impressed him; that he expected his time would at first be more taken up in seeing than in painting; and that he hoped by the time the leaves were on the trees he would be better qualified to attack them than he was the previous summer. C. R. Leslie mentions having seen at the Academy a large number of Constable's chalk drawings and oil paintings of the period, from the living model, some defective in outline, though all having great breadth of light and shade. As a student Constable was indefatigable in his industry and perseverance. Though it is reasonable to suppose his father's means were amply sufficient to have allowed the son to pursue his studies for the first year or so independently of any question of money getting, we read in a letter to Dunthorne, written in the autumn of 1799, that he employed his evenings in drawing and reading, hoping by the former to clear his rent, adding that he would be "very happy" if he could do so. His time was not wholly passed in London, where he "sometimes" saw the sky ("but fancy to yourself," he says, "how a pearl must look through a burnt glass"); during his first summer there he visited Ipswich, and fancied that he saw "Gainsborough in every hedge and hollow tree." When in London he "fagged at copying," to use his own expression, in order to acquire facility of execution, without which, he affirmed, he would be continually embarrassed, and his art would be a burden to him. The next year he made Helmingham Park, in Suffolk, the scene of his summer excursion, where he sketched all day, "alone among the oaks and solitude, sleeping by night at the untenanted parsonage, and repairing only to a farmhouse for his meals." In 1801 he selected Derbyshire, in which picturesque county he made many fine sketches. On his return he had become so convinced of the worth of Nature's truth that he tells us he had learnt to despise the "cold trumpery stuff" of his old acquaintances in the art. In this year he changed his lodgings in Cecil Street for three rooms in a very comfortable house, No. 80, Rathbone Place.

The letters written by Constable to his friends, which have been published, are so replete with individuality that their perusal gives indescribable pleasure, and charms us into the belief that we have known the writer and have been on terms of the most intimate friendship with him. His thought, his most inmost heart, is as well known to us, we imagine, as they were to that closest of friends of his, JOHN FISHER, of whom more anon. We can give no clearer idea of his character and disposition than by quoting extracts from his own writings. This is how he writes of a visit he made in 1799 to his second sister, Mrs. Whalley: "The regularity and good example in all things which I had an opportunity of seeing practised, not talked of only, during my stay with that dear family, will I trust be of service to me as long as I live. I find my mind much more decided, and since I have been this time in town I have acquired considerably what I have so long ardently desired—patience in the pursuit of my profession."

Two years later, writing to Dunthorne of his attendance at the anatomical lectures, to which Dr. Brookes the lecturer gave the Royal Academy students free admission, he said that with the exception of astronomy, of which he knew very little, he believed no study was so sublime, or so calculated to carry the mind to the Divine Architect, as anatomy.

"Indeed," he proceeded, "the whole machine which it has pleased God to form for the accommodation of the real man, the mind, during its probation in this vale of tears, is as wonderful as the contemplation of it is affecting. I see, however, many instances of the truth, and a melancholy truth it is, that a knowledge of things created does not always lead to a revelation of the Creator. Many of the young men in this theatre[1] are reprobates."

The first time that Constable's name appears as a contributor in the catalogues of the Royal Academy Exhibitions is in 1802, when he contributed *A Landscape*.

[1] Dr. Brookes' Anatomical Theatre, where the Lectures were delivered.

From this time until 1837, the year of his death, he was (excepting in 1804) annually represented on the walls, one hundred and four of his productions having been hung during these thirty-five years. The more important of these paintings we shall mention in their place.

In the spring of 1802, Dr. Fisher, Rector of Langham, who afterwards became Bishop of Salisbury, and who through life was a friend and patron to Constable, obtained for him the offer of a situation as a drawing-master in a school. Constable knew that if he accepted this post his professional prospects would be utterly ruined, and yet how to decline it without offending his influential patron puzzled him sorely. Fortunately he made a confidant of B. West, the President of the Royal Academy, who not only dissuaded him from relinquishing his chances of professional distinction but also kindly offered to act as intermediary between him and Dr. Fisher, and as his position helped him in the delicate business, he settled everything to everybody's satisfaction. One can hardly realize Constable ever seriously contemplating such a step, but he would be deeply averse to wounding the feelings of so generous a friend as Fisher. West was a very kind-hearted man, always ready to encourage and assist a young or doubting artist. On one occasion when Constable called upon him, gloomy at the rejection by the Hanging Committee of a picture of Flatford Mill which he had sent in, West cheered him up with these words :

"Don't be disheartened, young man, we shall hear of you again ; you must have loved nature very much before you could have painted a picture like this," at the same time practically showing him, by means of a piece of chalk, how the chiaroscuro might be improved. It was in May 1802 that Constable wrote Dunthorne a letter which is of some importance. He says : "For the last two years I have been running after pictures, and seeking the truth at second-hand. I have not endeavoured to represent nature with the same elevation of mind with which I set out, but have rather tried to make my performances look like

the work of other men. I am come to a determination to make no idle visits this summer. . . . I shall return to Bergholt, where I shall endeavour to get a pure and unaffected manner of representing the scenes that may employ me. There is little or nothing in the Exhibition worth looking up to. *There is room for a natural painter.*"

In spite of Constable's own words we are by no means satisfied that, even for so short a period, he ever lost sight of the grand end to be attained, or that he was for one instant unfaithful to the mistress he had devoted his life to—Nature. It is true that he copied pictures by other masters, "fagged away at copying," but that was in order to acquire execution; "the more facility of practice I get," he explained, "the more pleasure I shall find in my art." It was natural that as he acquired manipulative dexterity and mastered the mechanical part of his art his productions would more or less resemble those of Gainsborough, of Claude, or of any other master who had employed the same means as he used to carry out original ideas, just as a page from a popular novel resembles a page of Carlyle's 'Hero Worship' in so far as they are both printed from the same type; but the resemblance goes no further, the genius and style are different. Moreover, he had himself already said that he despised "the cold trumpery stuff" of his early acquaintances in art, so it is improbable that he ever tried to imitate his contemporary painters. It is most likely that the letter was written in a moment when he was suffering from those attacks of morbid dejection to which he was always subject; he had found the means by which he was slowly getting nearer to his unattainable ideal of excellence resembled the means which former masters had employed, and he trembled lest he should lose his way in the fog in which so many followers of his art had been lost—should mistake some point of excellence already reached by earlier masters for the real end of art, and thus degenerate into a mere copyist, or at best an imitator. But there was in Constable's case little cause to fear such a catastrophe, and we doubt whether any painter



YARMOUTH PIER. BY JOHN CONSTABLE. EXHIBITED IN 1831.

See page 105.

has ever steered a truer course between the conventionalism of the "brown fiddle, brown picture" school, and the "original execution" painters such as he who held his brush between his toes instead of his hand in order to be thought original.

In 1804 Constable did not exhibit at the Academy, but this year he painted an altar-piece for Bentham Church, *Christ blessing Little Children.* All the figures, which are life-size, are standing, except an infant in our Saviour's arms. The picture is devoid of merit beyond a creditable arrangement of the masses, and his only other attempt in this branch of art was in 1809, when he painted a single half-length figure of *Christ blessing the Bread and Wine,*[1] as an altar-piece for Nayland Church. The colouring of this second attempt shows some agreeable originality, and the general effect is pleasing; it is an advance on his first attempt at Scriptural composition, but the execution is very slight, and, altogether, the work does not justify the idea that the painter would ever have shone in subjects of this class.

In 1803 Constable had made a coasting trip in the East Indiaman "Coutts" between London and Deal, and during the month he was on board he made a large number of sketches, including one of the "Victory," from which he afterwards painted his large picture, *H.M.S. Victory in the Battle of Trafalgar between Two French Ships of the Line*, exhibited at the Academy in 1806. His pictures at the Exhibitions of 1807-8-9 consisted principally of the results of a two months' tour he made in 1806 in the Westmoreland and Cumberland lake district, during which he accumulated a large number of sketches, but none of the pictures he painted from these are considerable. He used to say that the solitude of the mountains oppressed his spirits; and though he could appreciate the scenery painted by others, such as Cozens or Girtin, his own nature led him to the enjoyment of a far different kind of landscape, with cornfields, windmills, villages, wagons, navigable rivers, and other objects suggestive of human industry, on which account Mr. Ruskin thus writes of him:

[1] This painting, which had suffered rapid deterioration from damp, was sent to London, to be restored, in 1880.

"His early education and associations were also against him; they induced in him a morbid preference of *subjects of a low class*." [1] As a parallel example of the abiding influence of early impressions we may instance the poet Cowper, whose love of the country had first been awakened by the sluggish streams and the willows of Olney, and who was oppressed and almost overcome by the grand scenery of the South Downs when Hayley tempted him to visit Eastham. A somewhat similar observation is recorded of Crabbe. About this time (1807) he was employed by the Earl of Dysart to copy a number of pictures, principally works by Reynolds. He maintained an irreproachable reputation; his uncle wrote expressing warm approval of his character and conduct.

About the year 1800 John Constable had made the acquaintance of a little girl, Maria Bicknell (daughter of the solicitor to the Admiralty), who was in the habit of going down to East Bergholt to visit her grandfather, Dr. Rhudde, rector of Brantham and Bergholt. The acquaintance had ripened with years into a tenderer feeling, and we gather from certain letters that in 1811 the young people entertained some ideas of marriage. Miss Bicknell, however, seems to have been just as dutiful a daughter as Constable was a son, and her parents, but more particularly her grandfather, forbidding any engagement between the lovers, she wrote in a strain which may be recommended as a model of propriety for all young ladies similarly situated. In the first letter we are favoured with (dated Nov. 1811), she addresses her lover as "My dear sir." She has consulted papa—vows to be entirely guided by him—and concludes, "with the most ardent wishes for your health, believe me, my dear sir, your obliged friend, Maria E. Bicknell." Altogether a most discreet letter. Her father was, however, hardhearted, or at any rate indisposed to give his consent to a union which might be the cause of his daughter being cut out of Dr. Rhudde's will. The objections of Miss Bicknell's friends to the engagement with the painter seems to have been entirely based upon pecuniary considerations, for

[1] 'Modern Painters,' 3rd edition, vol. i. p. 92.

John Constable was only a second son. Accordingly two days after the date of the letter just quoted we find Maria writing to say that she had received her father's answer, and that his only objection was on the score of "that necessary evil, money." So as she does not think that papa will relent she had better not write to Mr. John Constable any more, not at least until she "can coin." Of course the enamoured youth would not accept such a mild repulse as this, nor was his affection diminished even when his own father wrote, reminding him that his prospects and position were extremely critical; that he feared his chosen profession would not do more for him than cover the cost of living single; and advised him to apply himself diligently to his profession, and to "such parts that pay best." Advice given to people in such cases is generally physic thrown to dogs. In spite of Miss Bicknell's repeated determinations not to write any more, there are several other letters from her in which we catch allusions to stolen interviews in the parks and at picture galleries. The young lady's letters, however, throughout exhibit her in the character of an extremely matter-of-fact, prudent—some might say worldly-minded—young lady. On one occasion she wrote: "Indeed, my dear John, people cannot now live upon £400 a-year. It is a bad subject, so don't allude to it;" and on another she won't hear of his living as a recluse, as "popularity, which represents money, is only to be gained by mixing in the world."

During the course of this engagement, which did not run very smoothly—but then the course of true love never does—Constable constantly wrote to Miss Bicknell sensible, newsy letters, from one of which we learn that he had just paid a visit of ceremony to the obstructive Dr. Rhudde, which shows they were not on terms of the deadliest hatred. In another he gives an account of a fire at his lodgings where the people were burnt out. On this occasion he assisted in saving the goods, and when it was difficult and dangerous to pass up and down stairs on account of the great heat and smoke, he rushed up to a garret to save a poor female-servant's pockets which contained all her little wealth.

But he did not neglect his profession during this time. He worked very hard and diligently, exhibiting *Flatford Mill* in 1812, probably the picture which elicited the opinion from Mr. West, that the painter of it had already attained true excellence. Still, many of his friends even then urged him to relinquish "a profession so unpropitious." He painted two portraits of Dr. Fisher and his wife, which were much admired; and then his mother urged him, that, as he so greatly excelled in portraiture and Fortune seemed within his grasp, he should pursue that path most likely to bring him fame "and wealth." Miss Bicknell's letters constantly reminded him to look sharply after the main chance, and she plainly told him to "make money before he made love." His charge for a head, in 1813, was fifteen guineas, and his reputation as a portrait painter was on the increase. On May 3rd of that year he wrote in high spirits: "I am now leaving London for the first time with my pockets full of money. I am entirely free from debt, and I have required no assistance from my father."

In 1814 Constable sold the two pictures he exhibited in the British Gallery, a small one to Mr. Allnutt, and a large one of *A Lock*, to a perfect stranger, Mr. James Carpenter, who bought it merely because he liked it; thinking, however, that the sky might be improved, the purchaser employed another painter to put in a new one, the result being an inharmonious whole. Some years afterwards, Mr. Carpenter got a friend of his to ask Constable if he would restore the original sky, and at the same time cut down the picture, in order that it might form a companion to one of Callcott's. Constable consented to do this. When Mr. Carpenter called to see the work completed, he found that Constable had painted an entirely new picture for him, of the same size as the Callcott, which he offered in exchange, and that he would make no charge whatever for his work, explaining that Mr. Carpenter had been the means of making a painter of him, by buying the first picture he had ever sold to a stranger. Without for a moment wishing to question

Constable's gratitude in this transaction, we might point out that perhaps he was also influenced by another motive. It is well known that Constable was fond of getting back into his possession the pictures which marked the epochs in his career —and undoubtedly *A Lock* would be one of those that he would desire to have back. Again, he was of opinion that to cut down or alter a picture could seldom be done without injury to it; and for the sake of his reputation—especially when his painting was to hang as a companion to one of Callcott's —he preferred giving a new picture altogether to mutilating an old one.

In 1815 Constable received permission to again see Miss Bicknell at her father's, as an occasional visitor. In this year each of the young couple received a heavy blow—both Mrs. Constable and Mrs. Bicknell died; and the mutual need of sympathy and consolation knitted their hearts together more firmly than ever. The following year Constable lost his father; and after that event the two lovers made up their minds to delay no longer a union which they each felt must sooner or later be effected. So, in spite of opposition on the part of Miss Bicknell's friends, they were married in October at St. Martin's Church by the Rev. John Fisher. Mr. Bicknell did not long retain his resentment; and after a brief honeymoon at Osmington, the young couple settled down in Keppel Street, Russell Square.

Constable's life-friend was this Rev. John Fisher (afterwards Archdeacon Fisher), son of the Master of the Charterhouse, and a nephew of, and chaplain to, the Bishop of Salisbury. Constable was essentially a sociable man, besides which his nature required some sympathetic soul to which he could unburden himself, and pour out unreservedly all his grievances and troubles. Of course his wife occupied the first place in his affection, and Dunthorne and J. T. Smith were, to a certain extent, his confidants; Leslie, especially during the latter part of the painter's career, was a very near friend. But the friend

of friends—his *own particular friend*—was Fisher, who during his whole life acted the part of Constable's patron, adviser, admirer, and consoler. Fisher was, himself, no contemptible critic, and as an amateur he practised the art of painting a little.

The least mental annoyance or trouble reacted upon Constable's physical nature to a most lamentable extent, and the opposition he had met with in his suit had frequently caused him to suffer much ill-health during its progress. His close application to his profession also acted injuriously on his system. In June 1812, when he had marked out a path for himself very distinctly, and was desirous of pursuing it uninterruptedly, he steadfastly remained at his toilsome post in London, copying and repainting for Lady Heathcote, and looking forward to the time when he would be enabled to utilize his art to grander ends. His health was then sadly failing, and Fisher, anxious lest he should permanently injure his constitution by over-application, sent him this invitation: "We will try and coax you here, dear Constable, by an account of the life you will lead. We will rise with the sun, breakfast, and then sit out for the rest of the day. If we tire of drawing we can read, or bathe, and then home to a short dinner. We will drink tea at the Bensons', or walk the great aisle of the cathedral, or, if the maggot so bites, puzzle out a passage or two in 'Horace.' I think this life of Arcadian or Utopian felicity must tempt you." On another occasion Fisher wrote: "I was the other day fishing in the New Forest, in a fine, deep, broad river; with mills, roaring black water, withy beds, &c. I thought often of you during the day. I caught two pike, was up to my middle in watery meadows, ate my dinner under a willow, and was as happy as when I was a careless boy." From these extracts we can form a very clear notion of the sort of life Constable led in the country; and of his tastes and proclivities. Not only did Fisher constantly keep up Constable's spirits with most charming, invigorating letters, full of sympathy in adversity, congratula-

tions in success, and frequent kind advice, carefully hinted at rather than given; but he was also a substantial patron, purchasing the first two large landscapes that Constable executed—*The White Horse*, and *Stratford Mill*.

The White Horse was exhibited at the Academy in 1819, being then called, *A Scene on the River Stour*, and received the name by which we now know it from a white horse in a barge near the foreground. It is one of the artist's best works, and he himself spoke of it as one of his "happiest efforts on a large scale, being a placid representation of a serene grey morning in summer."

Stratford Mill was Constable's large picture in the 1820 Academy Exhibition. In the foreground are some children fishing, the largest boy "undergoing the agony of a bite," as Sir George Beaumont has expressed it. On the extreme left of the spectator the wheel and part of a water-mill are seen. To the right and in the middle distance a barge lies with extreme elegance of perspective in the smooth river, light clouds throw their rising shadows over a rising distance of great beauty, and a group of tall trees forms the centre of the composition."

There are some men so constituted that they can in the "durance vile" of a debtor's prison compose with a collected brain a brilliant article which will, the next morning, charm the world by the refinement of its imagery and the felicity of its expression; there are those who can leisurely give the last, dainty, finishing touches to a picture which has been painted to pay out the sheriff's officer who waits in a corner of the studio. Johnson, as a publisher's hack at £4 a month, could pour forth his giant soul from a garret; Morland was happy in a sponging-house. Such a one was Constable, and although there is nothing to show that he was ever actually in need of pecuniary assistance (save on one occasion of probably temporary embarrassment when he borrowed £20 or £30 of Fisher), yet he seems to have been rendered constantly uneasy on the score of money matters. But as Dr. Rhudde (who died in 1819) left his granddaughter

(Mrs. Constable) a legacy of £4000, and as in the same year Constable received a like amount as his share of his father's property, it does not appear that there was much cause for anxiety on this point, especially as Constable, unlike Wilson in that respect, did occasionally find purchasers for his landscapes, and his prices, though undoubtedly below the real value of the paintings, were an advance upon Wilson's pot of beer and the remains of a Stilton cheese for *Ceyx and Alcyone*.

For each of the six-foot landscapes, *The White Horse* and *Stratford Mill*, Constable received one hundred guineas. In 1824 he sold two large Landscapes and a smaller one to a Frenchman for exhibition in Paris for £250, and the same year he sold *A Boat passing a Lock* for £157 10*s*. on the first day of its exhibition, and he seems always to have had plenty of small commissions. In 1825 he complained of the irksomeness of having to paint a family group, the three grandchildren of an old friend, to send to their parents in India, which necessitated his neglecting a large landscape just then commenced; so that though Constable did not, perhaps, earn his money in the way most congenial to his inclinations, yet he was better off than many other unappreciated painters have been. Of course when we speak of him as an "unappreciated painter" we use the expression in a restricted sense; there was always a certain number of discriminating judges ready and able to understand his art; but for the English public, during his lifetime, his works had little or no interest, and his treatment being something novel and unfamiliar to his critics was condemned by them as eccentric and mannered.

In 1819 Constable was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. Up to this period the most important pictures he had produced were *Dedham Vale* and *A Church Porch* (1811); *Flatford Mill* (1812); *Boat Building* (1815); *Cottage in a Cornfield* (1817). This is the period of Constable's most perfect art, and it is doubtful whether in his latter years he quite kept up to the standard of *The White Horse* and *Stratford Mill* and



OSMINGTON, NEAR WEYMOUTH. BY JOHN CONSTABLE.

Exhibited at the British Gallery in 1819.

Hay Wain years. *The Church Porch* is that of Bergholt. It is really an extremely simple composition; a woman and a girl, sitting on a tomb, are listening in the summer afternoon to the words of an old man. There is nothing in it to attract one's attention; it has very few parts, but when once noticed it engages the mind of the spectator in a strange degree. In *Dedham Vale*, through a haze of sun-pierced mist an extensive range of country is seen; in the foreground is a slight tree of incomparable delicacy and taste; but these pictures were too unobtrusive to catch the attention or suit the taste of the public.

Constable's whole life was one of incessant, earnest hard work. He never, even for a moment, save when prostrated with illness, ceased striving after the highest attainable excellence. At the same time, the duty of providing for his family for ever presented itself to him, and to fulfil this appears to have been as important an object with him as the attainment of his ideal in art. Thus, he did not abandon portrait painting, which brought in a fair income. Amongst his portraits, in addition to those we have already mentioned, are those of *General and Mrs. Bebow*, and of a gentleman "who was" a dissenter, but without knowing why, "only that his wife would not let him go to church." That his pictures were really good, and that their sterling value would some time or other be appreciated by the public, *Constable never doubted;* but that their recognition might be delayed until after his death was a contingency which he looked boldly in the face. In 1821 he had become convinced of his fate, and he thus wrote to his friend: "I now fear (for my family's sake) that I shall never make a popular artist, *a gentlemen and ladies' painter;*" and on another occasion: "The Londoners, with all their ingenuity as artists, know nothing of the feelings of a country life, the essence of landscape."

It was in this year, when his early dream of distinction as a living artist had been dispelled, that he exhibited the third picture he had painted on a six-foot canvas, *Landscape—Noon*. This picture, which was afterwards known as *The Hay Wain*,

is one of his important productions, and was one of those which he sold to a Frenchman in 1824. It was greatly admired in Paris; in fact, Constable's art seems to have always been more appreciated in that capital than it was in England. He was assured that, if he would consent to visit Paris, the artists of that city would receive him with great *éclat*, and he was commissioned to paint seven smaller landscapes, and to have twelve of his drawings engraved in London for publication in Paris. In 1825 the French King awarded him a gold medal for his large Landscapes which were exhibited at the Louvre,[1] and he was afterwards applied to for the loan of a picture for an Exhibition at Lisle. It happened that just at this time he had in his possession *The White Horse* (Archdeacon Fisher's property), and this he sent to France. This picture was as much admired as *The Hay Wain* had been, and he was awarded a gold medal for it. Of course in Paris, as in London, the professional critics would not admit that his art was true, for in his pictures they could only see nature; and they naturally expected in a good painting, in one that they could rely upon as being correct in style, to see Claude, or Cuyp, or some other master whom it was the recognized thing to worship. Still the professional critics were not everybody, and they found it a difficult matter to answer such observations as: "Look at these landscapes by the Englishman—the ground appears to be covered with dew."

Constable was in the habit of spending a good deal of his time at Hampstead, which has always justly been a favourite resort of artists. It was from here that he wrote in the autumn of 1821: "I have done a good deal of skying, for I am determined to conquer all difficulties, and that among the rest;" and in 1822 he made fifty studies of sky effects. Out of twenty of these which were in Leslie's possession in 1845, there is only one in which the least vestige of landscape is introduced. They are painted in oil, on large sheets of thick paper, all dated, with

[1] On this occasion Sir Thomas Lawrence, whose pictures had also been exhibited at the Louvre, was created a Knight of the Legion of Honour.

the time of the day and other memoranda at the back, as, for example: "5th September, 1822, 10 o'clock, morning, looking south-east, brisk wind at west. Very bright and fresh grey clouds running fast over a yellow bed about half-way in the sky. Very appropriate to the coast at Osmington."

Several of Constable's happiest productions are views in the neighbourhood of Hampstead, the Heath there being a favourite subject which he painted several times. In 1827 he took a house in Well Walk, Hampstead, and this was his "country residence" for the rest of his life. He had previously removed from Keppel Street—Ruysdael House, as Fisher christened it—to 35, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, where, after taking the Well Walk house, he retained for professional purposes two parlours, large front attic, painting-room, gallery, &c.; this continued to be used as his studio till the time of his death.

Occasionally seeking change of scene, if not relaxation of study, in visits to his old home in Suffolk which he loved so well, or to Fisher at Gillingham, or to Sir George and Lady Beaumont at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, or with his wife and children to Brighton, perhaps no painter has ever worked harder than did Constable, altering, adding, taking out, retouching his subjects, with which he was never satisfied so long as any improvement could be suggested. He was never above taking a hint, even from those most unqualified to tender advice. On one occasion, however, in 1830, after he had been elected an R.A., he gave a well-deserved snub. He was finishing a picture called *A Dell at Helmingham Park*, and had adopted some alteration that an onlooker suggested, after which he made a stand, saying, "Very true, but don't you see I might go on and make the picture so good that it would be good for nothing."

Constable was always extremely anxious about his children, and their least ailment caused him a great deal of uneasiness; on one occasion one of them had the whooping-cough, which alarmed him very much, as he said it was a disorder which the medical men knew nothing about. His eldest son too, was ill in 1825

the effect of which was to almost prostrate the father. In the autumn of that year Fisher had been expecting him to pay a visit to Osmington, and had sent him a gentle reminder that time was flying, in the shape of a pen and ink sketch of an hour-glass with wings, and twelve days later he followed this with a letter in which he says: "It struck me after I had despatched my blank memorandum that the illness of yourself or some of the family was the cause of your non-appearance here." Then with much of the most kindly-expressed sympathy and condolence, the large-hearted Archdeacon places his Salisbury House at Constable's disposal as a sanatorium for his sick child, and says: "As for money matters, do not make yourself uneasy. Write for anything you want, and send me any picture in pledge you think proper. . . . Whatever you do, Constable, get rid of anxiety. It hurts the stomach more than arsenic. . . . You want a staff just at present. Lean upon me, *hard*."

In 1825 Constable exhibited at the Academy a picture known as *The Jumping Horse*. The chief object in its foreground is a horse mounted by a boy, leaping one of the barriers which cross the towing-path along the Stour to prevent the cattle straying out of their pasture grounds. As these bars have no gates, the barge horses are all taught to leap; their harness, ornamented over the collar with crimson fringe, lends a very picturesque appearance, and Constable, availing himself of this advantage to relieve the dark chestnut-coloured horse, produced a very imposing effect. The same year he had two Landscapes in the Exhibition, one of which was described in a newspaper at the time as "a scene without any prominent features of the grand or beautiful, but with a rich, broken foreground, sweetly pencilled, and a very pleasing and natural tone of colour throughout the green distance." Nevertheless the public would not take the trouble to understand the art of the painter.

1828 was a most eventful year to Constable. In January his seventh child, a son, was born. Then a large copyright Landscape of his was favourably noticed in the 'John Bull'

newspaper, which spoke of it as "a redeemer;" and a smaller one was purchased by Chantry; in this year, also, Mr. Bicknell died, by which event a large fortune, some £20,000, came to him. "This," he wrote, "I will settle on my wife and children, and I shall then be able to stand before a six-foot canvas with a mind at ease, thank God." Towards the close of the year he suffered an irreparable loss by the death of his wife, who had always been consumptive, and the bereaved husband was thus left with the care of seven children, the youngest an infant not yet a year old, and the memory of one of the most amiable and devoted wives man was ever blessed with. As might be expected Constable was sadly depressed by this melancholy occurrence, and he wrote that his only chance of being carried away from his own thoughts was to get afloat on a six-foot canvas.

In the beginning of 1829 he received a commission to paint a *Mermaid* for a sign for an inn in Warwickshire. No doubt the person who gave the order had heard Constable spoken of as a good landscape painter, and remembering that many of his predecessors, such as Wilson, Monamy, Morland, Clarkson, and Cotton had not disdained to paint signs, thought the artist would be glad of the commission. Constable himself thus wrote of this order: "*This is encouraging*, and affords no small solace after my previous labour in landscape for twenty years. However, I shall not quarrel with the lady now, she may help to educate my children." He made a very pretty and finished sketch of the *Mermaid*, and gave it to Mr. Evans, his medical attendant and a friend of Archdeacon Fisher and himself, but the matter went no further. Soon after this he was elected a Royal Academician. This was an honour he had long coveted; and how keenly he felt in the matter of its tardy bestowal we can understand from his complaint that, "it has been delayed until I am solitary and cannot impart it." At this time he was engaged in the preparation of his 'English Landscape,' a work which he published, to quote from the prospectus, "with the desire to increase the interest for, and promote the study of, the

rural scenery of England, with all its endearing associations and even in its most simple localities." In the preface to this book we see that Constable was fully aware of the obstacles which prevented him—as they had prevented Wilson—from being justly appreciated. "In art," he wrote, "there are two modes by which we aim at distinction. In the one by a careful application to what others have accomplished, the artist imitates their works or selects and combines their various beauties; in the other he seeks excellence at its primitive source—Nature. In the first, he forms a style upon the study of pictures, and produces imitative or selective art; in the second, by a close observation of Nature he discovers qualities existing in her which have never been portrayed before, and thus forms a style which is original. The results of the one mode, as they repeat that with which the eye is already familiar, are soon recognised and estimated, whilst the advances of the artist in a new path must necessarily be slow, for few are qualified to judge of that which deviates from the usual course, or are qualified to appreciate original studies." The original edition of this work as published by Constable contained twelve mezzotint engravings by Lucas from the painter's sketches. The frontispiece is a representation of the house at East Bergholt where he was born, under which are the lines:

"Hic locus ætatis nostræ primordia novit
Annos felices, lætitiæque dies,
Hic locus ingenuis pueriles imbuit annos
Artibus, et nostræ laudis origo fuit.

From the time of his election as R.A. until his death, Constable was little, if any, better appreciated by the public, but he went on working hard and bravely, sometimes with a light heart even, attending carefully to his duties as a member of the Committee of Management, and as a visitor at the Life School, doing his utmost to elevate and refine the art he loved so well.

In 1830 his pictures at the Academy were—*A Dell at Helmingham Park; A Landscape;* and *A Heath, Hampstead.*



SALISBURY CATHEDRAL (From the Meadows). BY CONSTABLE. EXHIBITED IN 1831.

See page 105.

In this year died Sir Thomas Lawrence, who was succeeded in the Presidency of the Royal Academy by Sir M. Shea.

In 1831 Constable's Academy pictures were his large *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, and *Yarmouth Pier*. The former of these, which was engraved by Lucas, is one of his chief works, of great truth of detail and general effect, and is a picture displaying extraordinary power. The artist, indeed, thought that it would eventually be considered his *chef d'œuvre*, *as*, though others might be more finished, *this conveys the fullest impression of the compass of his work*. It must be remarked that it is difficult to fix the date when many pictures painted by this artist may be said to have been *finished*, for he was always anxious to improve his work, and many of his best known pictures received their finishing-touches long after the year of their exhibition. The picture in question and his large *Waterloo Bridge* are notable examples of this.

Parley, the well-known drawing-master and astrologist, one day called upon Constable to show him a sketch, and chatted away for some time, unreservedly pointing out what he considered the defects in the artist's works. Constable, wishing to possess the sketch, asked Parley its price. "A guinea and a half to a gentleman, but a guinea only to an artist," was the reply. "I gave him the extra half-guinea," said Constable, relating this some time afterwards, "for he had conclusively proved that I was no artist."

In this year Constable was in terrible anxiety owing to the Reform Bill agitation, doubting the security of the Funds, and fearful that he would lose all his invested money. Ill-health had much to do with this, and in the spring of 1832 he had a very serious illness. Whilst he was barely convalescent and was still in a very low bodily state from the attack, the illness of his eldest daughter so filled him with trouble and anxiety that he fell into a most grievous state of dejection, and used to take a gloomy view of everything, giving vent to such utterances as these: "I do not contemplate a happy old age, even if I should

attain it." The loss of two of his friends also still further depressed him. In September died at Boulogne, Archdeacon Fisher; and a little later, at Bergholt, John Dunthorne, son of Constable's first preceptor in art, who had long acted as his assistant, succumbed to consumption. But Constable had by this time many friends, so the voids thus occasioned were less perceptible. There was C. R. Leslie, who was the great friend of his later days, and there was George Constable (no relation of the painter); and Mr. Purton of Hampstead, who in his leisure hours painted landscape, and who formed his opinions of Constable's style solely from a comparison with Nature, being deaf to the cant of the art criticism then prevailing. Of the eight works Constable exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1832, his large painting of *Waterloo Bridge* is by far the most important. Constable had had this work in progress since 1819, and during the years between then and its exhibition he had often taken it up, and as often put it aside, with alternating emotions of hope and fear. He was always very nervous about its success, and the absence from it of all rural associations made it somewhat distasteful to him, but the expanse of sky and water invariably tempted him to go on with it. It possesses great breadth, and when it first appeared it was described as being remarkable for its brightness of colour, Leslie saying that it looked as though painted with liquid gold and silver, yet "in little more than a year after his death its silvery brightness was doomed to be covered over with a coat of blacking, laid on by the hand of a picture-dealer; that this was done by way of giving tone to the picture I know from the best authority, the lips of the operator, who assured me that *several noblemen* considered it greatly improved by the process. The blacking was laid in with water and secured by a coat of mastic varnish."

In 1833 he exhibited a view of a *Heath—showery—noon*, which is one of his best works; a *Cottage in a Cornfield*, engraved afterwards by Lucas; and two others. In June of this year he delivered a lecture at Hampstead on the history of landscape

painting, the success of which induced him to repeat it in the following year, and he subsequently developed it into four lectures which he delivered at the British Institution ; the notes that have been preserved of these addresses are unfortunately very scant. The extreme sensitiveness of his disposition was as marked as ever. When his two eldest sons were about to leave him to go to a school at Folkestone, he wrote : " To part with my dear John is breaking my heart, but I am told it is for his good."

In the spring of 1834 Constable had another very painful illness, an attack of acute rheumatic fever, confining him to his room in February, and lasting for two months. He was consequently prevented from completing any important work for the Academy Exhibition, where he was only represented by three water-colour drawings. In the autumn of this year he, in company with Leslie, visited Lord Egremont at Petworth. At this time he would rise early, and would often make some beautiful sketch in the park before breakfast. Leslie going into his room one morning found him setting one of his sketches with isinglass. His dressing-table was covered with flowers, feathers of birds, and pieces of brick with lichens and mosses adhering to them, which he had brought home for the sake of their beautiful tints. Mr. George Constable used to relate how, whilst the painter was on a visit to him, he brought home from a common in the neighbourhood at least a dozen different specimens of sand and earth, of colours from pale to deep yellow, and of light reddish hues to tints almost crimson. The richness of these colours, contrasted with the deep greens of the furze and other vegetation on that picturesque heath, delighted him exceedingly, and he carried these earths home, carefully preserved in bottles, and also many fragments of variously-coloured stone. Once, when in the company of Mr. George Constable, as they were passing some slimy posts near an old mill, he said, " I wish you could cut off those tops and send them to me."

In 1834 he exhibited *The Valley Farm*, which is a view of a farm-house on the banks of the Stour, near Flatford Mill, known

as "Willy Lott's House," from the name of its eccentric occupier, who, it is said, during eighty years was never away from it for four whole days. It was a favourite subject of Constable's, and figures in several of his works. This picture (now in the National Gallery) was purchased by Mr. Vernon after he had seen it for the first time in the studio, and it received an enormous amount of attention from Constable; from October to the end of the year he was constantly hard at work upon it (after it had been exhibited at the Royal Academy), and he said that "oiling out, marking out, polishing, etc., seemed to agree with it wonderfully. The sleet and snow[1] have disappeared, leaving in their place silver, ivory, and a little gold." It was again publicly exhibited in the British Gallery, in 1836, in which year Constable was only represented at the Academy by a view of the Cenotaph erected by Sir George Beaumont to the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and by a water-colour of Stonehenge. He had contemplated sending in a large picture of Arundel Mill, but this was not in a sufficiently advanced state to be admitted even as a sketch.

Constable's death was extremely sudden. On the evening of 30th March, 1837, he attended a meeting at the Royal Academy, and walked home, accompanied part of the way by C. R. Leslie, being then apparently in good health. His kindness of heart showed itself on that occasion in his comforting a little girl who had slipped down in Oxford Street, and healing her hurts by the gift of a shilling. The following day he worked until evening at his large picture for the forthcoming Academy Exhibition, and then went out on a charitable errand in connection with the "Artists' Benevolent Association," of which body he was President. On his return he ate a hearty supper,

[1] The peculiar effect of bedewed leaves glistening in sunlight, which Constable loved to introduce into his pictures, puzzled the critics of his day sadly, for they were but very imperfectly acquainted with the real appearances of nature, and they invented the phrase, "Constable snows," to indicate what they could not understand.





See page 109.

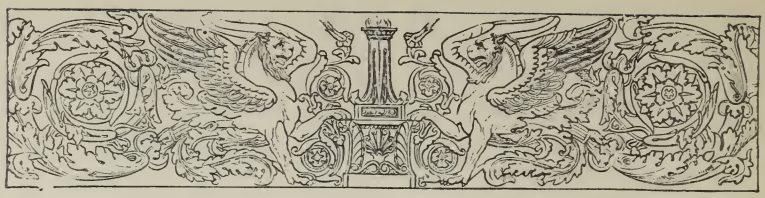
THE CORN FIELD. BY JOHN CONSTABLE.

In the National Gallery.

and retired to rest between ten and eleven o'clock. In the night he was taken ill, and before the next dawn he expired. The cause of his death could, at a post-mortem examination, only be traced to indigestion, as there were no other indications of disease sufficient to have produced death. Constable's close application and sedentary habits undoubtedly helped to undermine a constitution which might otherwise have enabled him to live to a ripe old age.

After his death, a few of his friends subscribed together and bought from his executors his picture of the *The Cornfield*, exhibited in the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1826, and at the British Gallery in 1827, and presented it to the nation. A field of ripe corn, the principal feature of this landscape, is seen in the middle ground, between two groups of trees occupying the sides of the picture. In the extreme distance is seen a village church towering above the humble dwellings in its vicinity.

The only other example of this artist's work in the National Gallery is *The Valley Farm*, already noticed as having been purchased from the easel by Mr. Vernon. In the Sheepshanks Gallery are six of his works.



CHAPTER II.

JOHN CONSTABLE'S PRODUCTIONS.

IN considering the genius of any painter as exhibited in his productions, it is difficult altogether to avoid reference to the works of other artists, and sometimes to speak of them in terms calculated to cause pain ; or, on the other hand, to withdraw from the subject of our consideration his full meed of praise.

In considering the works of John Constable, his style and his genius, the temptation to compare his pictures with those of Turner and others is very great, but our endeavour should rather be to consider them as works of art by themselves and on their own merits. Earnestly as we may desire to awaken or strengthen the appreciation of Constable's undoubtedly great genius, we should be unwilling to crown him with garlands stripped from the tombstones of some of our noblest painters, garlands placed there as tributes of affection by loving and reverent hands. And yet more than one even highly gifted and cultivated critic has fallen into this error. In order to avoid it then in our few remarks on John Constable's productions we shall endeavour to keep in mind an important truth which that painter expressed in these words :

" Every truly original picture is a separate study, and is governed by laws of its own ; so that what is right in one would

be entirely wrong transferred to another." This is of course applicable to the details of art; the grand principles which are invariably associated and co-existent with true genius—uprightness, earnestness, generosity, sensibility, imagination, and taste—we may be as certain of finding in the nature of Constable as in that of Turner, even as they were to be seen in the natures of Wilson, of Milton, of Dante, and of every other man of genius that the world has ever produced. These qualities, so far as they are present in the productions of such men, may best be considered and judged by their individual intrinsic worth. When we commence to compare men of genius one with another, we may very easily lose that nice sense of discrimination necessary for the proper appreciation of different degrees and sorts of merit, for though all have some things in common, the productions of each one must be judged separately, and each production considered as a complete whole.

For this reason, it is false criticism to compare the *parts* of Constable's pictures with the parts of Turner's or Canaletto's; or even to compare the pictures themselves except by reference to the principles of all true art of whatever kind soever; for every true work of art has its own excellence, and "what is right in one would often be entirely wrong if transferred to another."

The author of 'Modern Painters' in his summing up of Constable's art speaks of the necessity as well as the dignity of an earnest, faithful, loving study of Nature as she is, rejecting all that man has done to alter and modify her. He also points out that it is those artists who receive the word of God from clouds, and leaves, and waves, and keep it, endeavouring to render to the world purity of impression, who are fit objects of the critic's praise. But he adds in a footnote: "The feelings of Constable with respect to his art might be almost a model for the young student were it not that they err a little on the other side, and are perhaps in need of chastening and guiding from the work of his fellow-men. We should use pictures, not as authorities, but as comments on nature, just as we use divines, not as authorities,

but as comments on the Bible. Constable, in his dread of saint-worship, excommunicates himself from all benefit of the Church, and deprives himself of much instruction from the Scripture to which he holds because he will not accept aid in the reading of it from the learning of other men." Now, as a matter of fact, Constable is remarkable as one of the first—perhaps *the* first—of English Landscape Painters with genius of a very high order who was from first to last wholly and entirely independent of any of the conventionalism of the Foreign Schools, or even of anything borrowed from the English School. This is the sum total of his offending. So great was his love of nature, so great his horror of conventionalism, that he almost feared to learn the mechanical and technical methods of the art which were known to his predecessors and contemporaries. We say "almost" feared to learn, because that he did with much patient labour learn these modes there is ample proof in the admirable manipulation of many of his works, some of which show finish and detail equal to that of any master of the later, literal school. *A View of Hampstead Heath,* No. 36 in the Sheepshanks Collection at South Kensington, is a minute and careful study, perfect in its handling ; and in the glimpses of his practice that we get from his biographer, we gather that Constable's dread was not so much that of saint-worship as of being overpowered and mannerized by false teachers and commentators, and becoming ingulfed in the swamp of conventionalism. Constable did study such pictures as he could rely upon as being authentic imprints of genius. His earliest studies were pen and ink copies of Rafaelle's cartoons, and afterwards he copied etchings of Ruysdael ; throughout life, but especially in his student days, he made careful copies of paintings by Claude, Rubens, Reynolds, Ruysdael, Teniers, and Wilson ; and we are told that some of these copies might well pass for originals. Then again, at the commencement of his career, he had Girtin's drawings, made direct from nature, to examine and study, and to read from them how to reproduce certain effects of nature. The copying that

he did, except that done for payment in the regular course of his professional experience, was performed in order that he might acquire facility of execution (so he tells us himself); and after he had learnt by careful examination and experiment how certain effects in the works of the masters which he copied had been produced, he could then learn by inference how to produce other effects. He knew that if two genuine artists painted the same scene, the result would be two totally distinct pictures, not, as in the case of two photographs from the same negative, the one a duplicate of the other. He observed on one occasion: "The world is wide; no two days are alike, nor even two hours, neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of the world; and the genuine productions of art, like those of nature, are all distinct from each other."

Going more into details, we find Mr. Ruskin speaking of Constable's genius and art in the following terms: "Unteachableness seems to have been a main feature of his character, and there is a corresponding want of veneration in the way he approaches Nature herself. His early education and associations were also against him; they induced in him a morbid preference of subjects of a low order. I have never seen any work of his in which there were signs of his being able to draw, and hence the most necessary details are painted by him insufficiently. His works are also eminently wanting both in rest and refinement; and Fuseli's jesting compliment is too true; for the showery weather in which the artist delights misses alike the majesty of storm and loveliness of calm weather; it is great-coat weather and nothing more. There is a strange want of depth in the mind which has no pleasure in sunbeams but when piercing painfully through clouds, nor in foliage but when shaken by the wind, nor in light itself but when flickering, glistening restless and feeble. Yet with all these deductions, his works are to be deeply respected as thoroughly original, thoroughly honest, free from affectation, manly in manner, frequently successful in cool colour, and especially realizing certain motives of English scenery, with

perhaps as much affection as such scenery, unless when regarded through media of feeling derived from higher sources, is calculated to inspire."

The place which Constable filled in art is one which has hitherto been unoccupied either by Wilson, or Gainsborough, or Cozens, or Girtin, or even by Turner. He was a genuine painter of English cultivated scenery, of cornfields and of farmsteads, and of the haunts of rustic humanity. His scenes teem with human associations; he paints canals, barges, windmills, locks. This is perhaps what is meant by the charge that he had "a morbid preference for subjects of a low order." But surely these subjects as he treated them should scarcely be so classed. If he painted a barge, he also painted God's leaves, and waves, and clouds; painted them in a style that leaves little doubt as to the veneration with which he approached Nature. His early education and associations can scarcely be said to have been against him, for these were in the midst of that pastoral landscape he loved so well. He has told how he loved the sound of water escaping from mill-dams; willows; old moss-covered planks and brickwork; slimy posts—how with him painting was but another word for feeling—how he associated his careless boyhood with all that lies on the banks of the Stour, "*the scenes which had made him a painter*," and how he had often thought of pictures of them before he ever touched a pencil. Surely, unless it were better that he had lived only to grind corn, and unless it were better for the world that such pictures as *The Valley Farm*, *The Cornfield*, and *The White Horse*, had never been produced, it is no matter for regret that John Constable's boyhood was passed in the midst of such scenery as lies round East Bergholt, with "its gentle declivities, its luxuriant meadow-flats, sprinkled with flocks and herds, its well-cultivated uplands, its woods and rivers, with numerous scattered villages and churches, farms, and picturesque cottages." Such was the nature that Constable began by loving; from loving it he proceeded to study it, and then to paint it. He never

swerved from his affection for this class of scenery, though that he could and did appreciate *fully* other classes of landscape is evident from his extravagant praises of Cozens, whom he called "the greatest genius that ever touched landscape;" and of Turner, than whose landscapes it were difficult to imagine anything lovelier except the actual scene he portrayed. But he did not aspire to be a universal painter; he frequently expressed himself to the effect that he would rather paint one thing well than all things moderately; he considered that to bring the whole of nature within the domain of his art was too great a task for any one painter; and as he commenced so he continued, regardless whether he might not, by changing his subjects, have been able to tickle the public fancy. "Change of weather and effects," he observed, "will always afford variety." What if Van de Velde had quitted his sea-pieces and Ruysdael his waterfalls, and Hobbema his native woods!—the world would have lost so many features in art." He was not to be tempted from the path he had rigidly marked out. After observing that a particular novel effect might gain him some new admirers but it would be sure to lose him many old ones, he on one occasion said: "I imagine myself to be driving a nail. I have driven it some way, and by persevering I may drive it home; by quitting it to attack others, though I may amuse myself I do not advance beyond the first whilst the particular nail stands still."

The most complete answer to the absurd accusation that Constable was unable to draw is to point to his works. It may be mentioned that Constable was in the habit of making a sketch of every large picture he painted; in these sketches he laid in the subjects with the palette-knife, in a grand and large manner, with great breadth. Describing two of these, *i. e. The Hay Wain* and *The Jumping Horse*, Redgrave says: "Various glazings have been passed over the parts (thus laid in with the knife) to bring together and enrich them (even the skies are glazed); and then the whole has had enhancing points of colour

added, and brightness and daylight obtained by further draggings and knife-touches. With the exception of the glazings it would seem as if the brush had not been used upon them; hence there is a complete absence of any sort of detail. In *The Jumping Horse* are several figures in a boat on the canal; they are in shadow, and are merely flat masses of grey; the chestnut horse jumping the bar, with his red-waistcoated driver, are mere blots of colour, yet of the purest local truth. The trees are masses of green, with grand, simple, grey branches, but no indications of leafage. Viewed at a distance the scheme of the picture is complete, the local truth of the colour beautifully felt, and the freshness and daylight are startling."

It has been suggested that Mr. Ruskin's criticism would apply to the impression likely to be received from some of these sketches, for as they are complete in effect though not in detail they are sometimes mistaken for the pictures. In this case not only the ignorance of drawing, but also the want of reverence in approaching nature, with which Constable was charged, are explained away.

It was not only in his sketches, but also in his finished pictures, that Constable used the palette-knife instead of a brush for laying in the colour. This plan he adopted in order to get chiaroscuro, which he was determined his pictures should have if they had nothing else. In pursuit of that, and of the brightness of nature, the reproduction of which baffles all the ordinary processes of painting, he, in his painting of *Waterloo Bridge*, indulged in this mode of execution (which of course precludes great detail) to such an extent that the critics were much offended with what they called the unfinished state of the work, though the effect wished for, that of noontide splendour, was complete. Still, lest this means should degenerate with him into a manner, he stated after the exhibition of that picture that he had laid down the palette-knife, but not until after he had "cut his own throat with it."





See page 108.

THE VALLEY FARM. (WILLY LOTT'S HOUSE.) BY JOHN CONSTABLE.

In the National Gallery.

Supposing it were true that Constable painted "great-coat weather and nothing more;" supposing he had not depicted the most glorious golden warmth and sunshine of English summer in such pictures as *Waterloo Bridge* and *Boat Building;* supposing that one did not feel the summer in the *White Horse*, in *Stratford Mill*, and in *The Hay Wain*, with which pictures it appears Mr. Ruskin is unacquainted, but in some of which it has been truly observed that the tremulous vibration of the heated air near the ground may be seen; what does this criticism amount to but that Constable was not a universal genius, and did not attempt more than he was able to perform? But it is difficult to read the reflection on the strange want of depth in the mind which takes *no* delight in sunbeams, nor foliage, nor light, except at certain times, and under certain conditions in which the artist happens to be peculiarly successful in painting them, without concluding that the writer had not sufficiently studied the artist's works, and knew little or nothing of his character or tastes.

Apart from the question whether showery weather, breeze-shaken foliage, and sun-pierced clouds (we do not know the circumstances under which sunbeams are considered to pierce *painfully* through clouds) are or are not subjects of too low an order to be worthy of any but the *morbid* preference of such an artist as John Constable, it must be pointed out that the artist has, in works we have already mentioned, shown that he could take keen delight in scenery such as all critics admit to be worthy of admiration, and was capable of regarding such "through media of feeling derived from higher sources."

Indeed, that Constable loved all nature very much is as plainly evident to the most casual observer of his pictures as it was to the President of the Royal Academy, when the disappointed painter took him the rejected picture of *Flatford Mill* in order to be taught how to improve in his art, and in all humility learn from his fellow-artists. But to the careful and sympathetic reader of his pictures there is a yet deeper love

revealed, a love which amounts to veneration. And yet, if Constable had never painted a picture in his life, his writings abound with passages showing in what reverence he held Nature in all her phases. One passage alone will suffice to illustrate this: "The landscape painter must walk in the field with an humble mind. No arrogant man was ever permitted to see Nature in all her beauty. If I may be allowed to use a very solemn quotation, I would say most emphatically to the student, 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.'"

Much of the querulous opposition to Constable was undoubtedly owing to the fact that he was essentially a *new* man, claiming to choose for himself not only the subjects he should paint but the style in which they were to be represented, and the treatment to be employed in order to gain the end he had in view. He cared nought for what had been done, simply because it was a style or treatment that had hitherto been recognized; but whilst taking advantage to the utmost of those means which school-painters held to be alone legitimate, he hesitated not to avail himself of any means whatever that he could think of in order to produce a desired effect. For this reason it was he employed his palette-knife so largely, and of course in so doing avoiding all littleness of execution; paying no attention to mere details as long as he could gain a greater advantage by treating the general truths of nature as to colour and chiaroscuro largely and simply. In this mode of execution Constable from the first regarded his picture as a whole, producing the general effect, and afterwards working in sufficient details to satisfy truth of form without detracting from the generalization he aimed at. This is an exactly contrary method to that adopted by the New School—for School it is in the ordinary sense of the word—of English Landscape Painters, which is founded on pre-Raphaelism, and in which, by careful and laborious execution of every detail and part, it is endeavoured at last to produce a general effect—a whole. Without entering into a technical discussion as to which of these modes is more

likely to produce the desired end—a faithful representation of the appearance of nature—we may observe that we have not hitherto seen any landscapes of the New School equal in power and general truth to those of Constable, Wilson, and some others.

Perhaps the part of inanimate nature to which Constable paid the greatest attention was the sky. How closely he studied this may be gathered from his remarks in the letter-press accompanying the engraving called *Spring*, in the 'English Landscape.'

"The natural history, if the expression may be used, of the skies, which are so particularly marked in hailstorms at this time of the year, is this:—The clouds accumulate in very large masses, and from their loftiness seem to move but slowly: immediately upon these large clouds appear numerous opaque patches, which are only small clouds passing before them, and consisting of isolated portions, detached probably from the larger clouds. These, floating much nearer the earth, may perhaps fall in with a stronger current of wind, which, as well as their comparative lightness, causes them to move with greater rapidity; hence they are called by wind-millers and sailors, *messengers*, and always portend bad weather. They float midway in what may be termed the lanes of the clouds; and from being so situated are almost uniformly in shadow, receiving a reflected light only from the clear blue sky immediately above them. In passing over the bright parts of the large clouds they appear as darks, but in passing the shadowed parts they assume a grey, a pale, or a lurid hue."

On another occasion he wrote: "That landscape painter who does not make his skies a very material part of his composition neglects to avail himself of one of his greatest aids. Sir Joshua Reynolds, speaking of the landscapes of Titian, of Salvator, and of Claude, says: 'Even their skies seem to sympathize with their subject.' I have often been advised to consider my sky as *a white sheet thrown behind the objects*. Certainly, if the sky is obtrusive, as mine is, it is bad: but if it is evaded, as mine are

not, it is worse; it must and always shall with me make an effective part of the composition. It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the key-note. . . . The sky is the source of light in nature, and governs everything. . . . My skies have not been neglected though they have often failed in execution, no doubt, from an over-anxiety about them, which will alone destroy that easy appearance which Nature has in all her movements."

In most of Constable's skies are masses of soft, warm, grey colour, the edges appearing to be touched with liquid silver; and through these, far beyond, one catches an occasional glimpse of the blue empyrean. He could not understand the "white sheet" theory when his beloved clouds offered such indescribable contrasts of glowing sunbeam and cool shadow. Some of Constable's sky effects are admirably illustrated in engravings from his works, amongst which we may mention particularly *Spring*, *Yarmouth*, *Summer Afternoon after a Shower*, *Hadleigh Castle*, *Summer Evening*, and *A Summer-land*.

Another feature of his art is the dewy freshness of his grass and his emerald foliage. He was essentially a summer painter, and revelled in depicting the special characteristics of our lovely land in the heyday of its beauty. When Sir George Beaumont asked him if he did not find it sometimes difficult to know where to place his "brown tree" in a landscape, he replied, "No, for I never paint one." He saw that the foliage in summer was green—and painted it so; he saw that the summer shower and the morning dew gave the verdure additional beauty—and painted what he saw; he saw that in the summer sun the green leaves sparkle, and glisten, and glitter—and thus he painted them; and so he was told that his dazzling white light looked like sleet and snow; and then "Constable's snow" became a rare joke with the connoisseurs, who avoided brightness and light as they would a plague-stricken thing, and who had hob-nobbed with Sir George Beaumont, convinced that the "brown fiddle, brown picture" theory was the correct one. And after poor Constable's death, some

barbarian hand robbed *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*, the picture that had cost him over thirteen years' anxiety and application before he could give it the wealth of noontide brightness it at last possessed; some barbarian hand robbed that picture of its very soul, clouded out its sun with a coat of filthy blacking and mastic varnish, to *tone it* and make it to the taste of "several noblemen."

We have referred to the phrase "Constable's snow," and it may be well to say a few words on his practice of painting landscapes when the sun was high in the heavens, out of the picture, and well in front of his easel. Till his time landscape painters had usually painted sunlit landscapes when the sun was behind them, and either on the right or on the left, and they had looked on the subject from the same quarter as the sun; some had painted the sun in the picture, and Claude's and Cuyp's lovely sunsets, where the glow from the orb sinking below the horizon floods over the earth in a glorious golden mist, are, perhaps, as fine specimens of this effect as any in the art. But our summer painter loved well the noontide splendour; and nature, seen right under the sun, reveals many beauties which are not otherwise to be seen; under the sun the shadows are broad, and their colours full and rich; the white light, too, is transmitted through the thinner foliage of the trees, and, unneutralized by the reflected blue or grey of the heavens, is seen in vivid contrast with the full shadows; and he also saw that all leaves, to a greater or a lesser extent, were fitted to reflect light, and glittered and sparkled in the glad sunshine like jewels reflecting rays of pure white light—this he painted. The result was that critics who knew everything about painting and nothing about nature could not understand his truth. The great faithfulness with which he produced the effects of summer light, and painted *heat* even, was due to a departure from the recognized school-methods of execution. It had been the custom, and even Turner had followed it, to use the warm colours (red, orange, and yellow), to convey the idea of warmth.

In firelight effects this would be all very well, but Constable hardly used these colours at all when he painted his summer heat, because he could not see them in nature. His predominant masses were blues, greens, and greys. Red, orange, and yellow are only seen in the sky in the coolest hours of the day—night and morning—and sunlight only intensifies its natural glories; white seeming a more intense white, and blue remaining a perfect blue untinged with green, because the light of the sun is the purest, whitest light imaginable. This, and his nearly universal choice of summer as the time in his subjects, also accounts for his *greenness*, for it is only in spring, autumn, and winter that brown tints prevail in the foliage of England; in summer our country is essentially and characteristically green. A celebrated German critic thus expresses his opinion of Constable's style and genius: "This painter gives us everything that can be possibly desired in a landscape artist of realistic tendency; his lively feeling for the picturesque as seen in the simplest forms of nature, perfect truthfulness in every part, transparent and powerful colouring, and free yet careful execution, enable him to place the rural scenes of England before us in the most unpretending and attractive form."

PICTURES BY GAINSBOROUGH IN PUBLIC GALLERIES IN ENGLAND.

LONDON. *National Gallery.*

The Market-Cart.
The Watering-Place.
Musidora Bathing her Feet.
The Watering-Place.
Woody Landscape, Sunset.
Rustic Children.
Study for a Portrait (*Mr. Abel Moysey*).
Portrait of Mrs. Siddons. *Painted in* 1784. *Half-length.*
Portrait of Ralph Schomberg, Esq., M.D.
Portrait of Orpin, Parish Clerk of Bradford, Wiltshire.
Portraits of Mr. J. Baillie, of Ealing Grove, his Wife and four Children.
Landscape ("Gainsborough's Forest").

Dulwich Gallery.

Portraits of Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Tickell.
Portrait of P. J. de Loutherbourg, Esq., R.A.
Portrait of Thomas Linley, Esq. *Born in* 1730.
Portrait of Samuel Linley, Esq., R.N. ("*There is a tradition that this head was painted in forty-eight minutes.*")
Portrait of Thomas Linley, Esq. *Born in* 1756.
Portrait of Mrs. Moodey and her Children.

LONDON. *South Kensington Museum.*

Group of the Princesses Charlotte Augusta Matilda, Augusta Sophia, and Elizabeth, elder daughters of King George III.

Sketch for a whole-length portrait of a Female (*pencil and wash*).

Carrying Lambs (*chalk*).

Sketch for the Portrait of Master Buttall, known as "The Blue Boy" (*pencil and water-colour*).

View of a Mansion (*chalk and India ink*).

Landscape with Buildings (*chalk and India ink*).

National Portrait Gallery.

Portrait of Jeffery, first Lord Amherst.

Portrait of Charles, first Marquis Cornwallis.

Portrait of George Colman.

Hampton Court.

Portrait of Fischer, the Musician.

Portrait of Colonel St. Leger.

EDINBURGH. *National Gallery.*

The Honourable Mrs. Graham, Wife of General Lord Lynedoch. (*A first study made by the painter for the head of the full-length, lent by Mr. Maxton Graham of Cultoquhey, is also in the Gallery.*)

DUBLIN. *National Gallery.*

Portrait of Hugh, Duke of Northumberland, K.G. *Born in* 1712.

PICTURES BY CONSTABLE IN PUBLIC GALLERIES IN ENGLAND.

LONDON. *National Gallery.*

The Corn Field (or Country Lane). *Painted in* 1826.

The Valley Farm (Willy Lott's House). *Exhibited at the Royal Academy in* 1835.

A Cornfield with Figures.

Barnes Common.

LONDON. *South Kensington Museum.*

Salisbury Cathedral. *Signed and dated* 1823.
Dedham Mill. *Signed and dated* 1820.
Hampstead Heath. *Exhibited at the Royal Academy in* 1830. *Signed on the back.*
Hampstead Heath. *Exhibited at the Royal Academy in* 1827.
Boat-Building, near Flatford Mill.
Water Meadows, near Salisbury.

CHRONOLOGY.

CONSTABLE.

1776 Birth. June 17.

1795 Introduced to Farrington.

1799 Becomes Student of the Royal Academy.

1803 Takes Coasting Trip in the "Coutts."

1812 Exhibits *Flatford Mill.*

1815 Marriage. Death of Mother.

1819 Exhibits *White Horse.* Elected A.R.A.

1825 Receives Gold Medal from the French King.

1827 Takes house at Hampstead.

1828 Death of Mrs. Constable.

1829 Elected R.A.

1837 Death. March 30.

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EDITED BY EDWARD J. POYNTER, R.A.

DIRECTOR FOR ART: SCIENCE AND ART DEPARTMENT.

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WITHIN the last few years an interest in art—not unfrequently genuine enough—has sprung up, which is very widespread, and which is increasing far beyond the circle of the few highly cultivated persons who at one time constituted the amateur classes. But if this interest is to be more than a fashion, a definite and systematic knowledge of art must be its foundation.

The object of this series of Text-books is to provide that such a knowledge should form part of general education; and it would seem hardly necessary to point out the advantages to be gained from their use in this direction, did we not know of the strange belief, that the appreciation of good or bad in art is a mere matter of taste.

This belief does not extend to literature, the rudiments of which, far in excess of what is required for reading, writing, and grammar, are taught in all our higher schools. It is supposed, for instance, that the intention in teaching Greek and Latin in our public schools goes beyond the mere benefit to be derived from subjects requiring regular application; the knowledge thus conferred forms at the same time a basis of the etymology of an important section of modern languages. Something of the history of classic literature is also supposed to be acquired. Most boys, on leaving school, know at least who Homer, Æschylus, Virgil, and Horace were, and what they did. They have probably learnt also how Virgil's Epic is founded on Homer's; how Æschylus led the way to Sophocles and Euripides; they have learnt from Horace the various forms of versification which he used, and whence they were derived, and much more of the same kind; in fact, unless more than the

usual amount of time has been devoted to athletics, they come away with a sufficient general acquaintance with fine literature to form their taste and to help them to pursue the subject in after-life if so inclined.

But it is doubtful whether the large majority of boys would not be puzzled by an allusion to the names of Phidias or Michelangelo. They may have heard of Raphael, because his cartoons for the Vatican tapestries are in this country, and they may have seen prints of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, but there are very few who would come well out of an examination as to any other works of these great artists. As regards the rise, progress, culmination, and hardly contested decline of the various schools of art—GREEK, ROMAN, ITALIAN, SPANISH, GERMAN, FLEMISH, FRENCH, ENGLISH—for aught that the well-educated schoolboy knows of their history, it may be said that the great men who were the instruments of change and improvement might have existed in the Eocene period, or in the planet Mars, rather than in our own globe, and in times with whose history he is otherwise familiar.

When the English public begins to understand that a knowledge of art requires just such a foundation of definite instruction as is given to literature, they will wonder that the subject is still as foreign to the curriculum of the English schoolboy as if the Greeks of old had been as destitute of art as the barbarous nations of the north whose languages he rarely deigns to study.

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"Mr. Poynter's name is warrant enough for the value of the Art text-books which he has undertaken to edit. Those already published, *Classic and Italian Painting*, and *Architecture, Gothic and Renaissance* (Sampson Low and Co.), the former by Mr. Poynter and Mr. Percy Head, the latter by Mr. Roger Smith, are admirably done. 'Painting' begins with Egypt, and passes on to the Greek masters, of some of whose works we perhaps have copies on the so-called Etruscan vases, and on the walls at Pompeii, and in those ruins near the Baths of Titus, where have been found the finest existing relics of ancient painting. On early Christian Art, with its Pagan symbolism (Christ

being Orpheus), and on Byzantine work there are some interesting remarks; and then begins the history of the Art-revival in which Pisa with Giunta, Siena with the earlier Guido and Duccio, and Florence with Cimabue and Giotto, all claim a share. Then early in the fifteenth century comes Fra Angelico of Fiesole; and from him down to the late Venetians, Canaletto and Tiepolo, every painter of note is duly characterised according to the school to which he belonged.

"Part of Mr. Smith's volume was delivered in the form of lectures to the young military engineers at Chatham. He writes not so much for professional architects as for those 'who pursue the fine arts as a necessary part of a complete liberal education.' Starting at once with the pointed arch, with a too meagre reference to the different forms of Roman which in different parts of Europe preceded it, he follows the changes in architecture, first in England, then in France, then in Central, and lastly in Southern Europe. We wish he had given some hint of the origin of that style which spread so rapidly from Portugal to the Danube as he does of the origin of the Renaissance, which was, in architecture as in all else, a going back to classical models. Both volumes are on the whole well illustrated. We specially note the Alcazar at Toledo, the cathedral at Orvieto (ugly, as Italian Gothic always is), and the engravings after Michael Angelo in the volume on Painting. Mr. Poynter's preface is a valuable introduction to the series, of which we do not hesitate to say that there is none more promising of the many sets of manuals now in course of publication. Art needs an education just as much as Science; and to give this education conscientiously is Mr. Poynter's aim."

2. From *The Architect*, July 3, 1880.

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3. From a Criticism by Mr. Wyke Bayliss.

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1. From a Review in the *Spectator*, July 5, 1879.

"It is high time that some thorough and general acquaintance with the works of these mighty painters should be spread abroad, and it is also curious to think how long their names have occupied sacred niches in the world's

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2. Reprinted from the *Times*, January 22, 1880.

"Few things in the way of small books upon great subjects, avowedly cheap and necessarily brief, have been hitherto so well done as these biographies of the Great Masters in painting. They afford just what a very large proportion of readers in these hurrying times wish to be provided with—a sort of concentrated food for the mind. The Liebigs of literature, however, especially in that of the fine arts, need no small amount of critical acumen, much experience in the art of system, and something of the bee-like instinct that guesses rightly where the honey lies. The writers of these biographies have, on the whole, succeeded in giving an excellent *aperçu* of the painters and their works, and better where they have adhered to the lives written by acknowledged specialists—such as M. Vosmaer for Rembrandt, Passavant for Raphael, and Dr. Woltmann for Holbein. The life of Holbein is by the editor, with whom the idea of such a series originated, and to whose great experience is to be attributed the very valuable copies of all the important pictures contained in the different biographies. These have been selected with great taste and judgment, and being taken generally from less well-known works by the masters, they enhance the interest and add much to the practical utility of the books. The chronological lists of the works of the masters are also very useful additions."

3. From *La Chronique des Arts*, March 20, 1880.

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